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**Understanding boys' attitudes to writing
influences of gender and socio-economic stereotyping**

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**UNDERSTANDING BOYS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS WRITING:
INFLUENCES OF GENDER AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC
STEREOTYPING**

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ABSTRACT

Writing is an important way of expressing one's thoughts and communicating ideas and views to others, but for the last two decades boys have underachieved in writing in comparison to girls. Although much has been written in the field of gender in relation to children's differential achievement in literacy, less has been written about the combined influences of gender and socio-economic factors. In this study I sought to better understand the influence of gender and socio-economic factors in the way boys are perceived by their teachers, and the influence of this on the boys' view of themselves as writers. In order to gather data from children, learning in schools where they were drawn from different socio-economic backgrounds, and to explore changes over time, I conducted my study over a three-year period in three primary schools in a large urban area in London with high levels of deprivation. I interviewed the same small groups of boys annually as they progressed from Y4 to Y6 in their primary schools and interviewed their teachers.

My findings have shown that the boys' classroom teachers had a significant influence on the way they viewed themselves as writers and their response to writing in their classrooms. In classrooms where teachers viewed boys as a gendered group, rather than as individuals, the boys harboured strong feelings of inequity and perceptions that girls outperformed boys in writing, and this became more acute where there was little or no change in their circumstances as they progressed from Y4 to Y6. Where teachers also held a deficit view of the language the boys spoke at home, they did not encourage the boys' families to participate in their literacy learning and the boys did not develop the habit of writing at home and school. In these conditions, the boys had low self-belief and had difficulty starting and sustaining their writing.

However, this situation was not static for one group of boys, whose Y5 and Y6 teachers had more enlightened views of the boys and adopted a more holistic approach to the teaching of writing, central to which was a culture of dialogue where they **consulted** with the boys to identify their issues and explore their preferences, **collaborated** with their colleagues to reflect on and resolve issues in their literacy teaching and **communicated** with the boys' families to encourage them to fully

participate in their boys' literacy learning at home. In these conditions, the boys thought they had equal opportunities to do well in their writing, had strong self-belief and showed greater commitment to their writing tasks in the classroom.

My study has highlighted the factors that contribute to the conditions that either trap the boys in a downward learning spiral or promote their learning in an upward spiral. I identify the central importance of the classroom teacher in creating a classroom climate where boys have a sense of equity, where they feel valued and are trusted to have autonomy over their writing, such as through choice of genre, collaborative writing with their peers or use of computers for writing. I assert the importance of a school culture where teachers are able to collaborate, critically reflect on and share their literacy practice, and the need for family involvement in children's learning to be a priority in the school literacy policy, of most significance for schools serving children from mainly disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. Most importantly, my findings have shown the significance of nurturing the boys' self-belief and their sense of identity as writers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE	1
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2
ABSTRACT	3
TABLE OF CONTENTS	5
INDEX OF TABLES & FIGURES	11
CHAPTER 1: RESEARCH INTRODUCTION	14
Introduction	14
My background and positioning in relation to this study	15
The purpose of the study	18
Raising Boys' Achievement (RBA) Study	19
Research approach	20
Research questions	21
Timeliness of the study	21
Outline of thesis	22
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	24
Introduction	24
Children's attitude to writing	26
<i>Defining and measuring attitude</i>	26
<i>APU</i>	27
<i>NLT</i>	29
<i>Knudson</i>	29
<i>Issues in measuring attitude</i>	30
The gender gap in children's literacy achievement	31
<i>PISA</i>	32
<i>PIRLS</i>	33
<i>DfES</i>	35
<i>Responses to the gender differences in test results</i>	36

Gender issues in relation to boys aged 8 – 11 years	37
<i>Theoretical perspectives on gender and achievement</i>	37
<i>Gender stereotyping</i>	39
<i>Influence of home on children's aptitudes towards school subjects</i>	40
<i>Influence of classroom culture on boys' attitude to writing</i>	42
<i>Strategies to challenge gender stereotypes</i>	45
Socio-economic issues in relation to children's literacy achievement	48
<i>Socio-economic gap in literacy</i>	48
<i>Access to resources</i>	49
<i>Culture of the classroom</i>	50
<i>Role of the family in children's literacy learning</i>	51
The teaching and learning of writing in school classrooms	53
<i>Historical background on the methods of teaching writing</i>	
1790 – 1990	54
<i>Process and genre approach to teaching writing</i>	55
<i>Teaching the technical aspects of writing</i>	57
Grammar	57
Punctuation	59
Spelling	60
Handwriting	61
<i>Teaching writing within the context of the National Literacy</i>	
Strategy	63
<i>The role of teacher education</i>	66
The role of self-belief and motivation in children's literacy learning	67
<i>Self-efficacy</i>	67
<i>Self-esteem</i>	69
<i>Motivation and achievement theory</i>	70
<i>Motivational challenges in learning to write</i>	71
<i>The role of ICT in motivation and writing</i>	72
<i>The role of pedagogy and school culture in fostering self-belief</i>	
and motivation	73
<i>Measuring children's self-perceptions as writers</i>	75
Conclusion	76

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	79
Introduction	79
Research approach	80
Analysis approach	82
<i>Grounded theory procedures and techniques</i>	83
Timeline of research study	85
Pilot study	86
<i>Trial of focus group interviews</i>	87
<i>Focus group interview guide</i>	87
<i>Recording equipment</i>	88
<i>Transcription and analysis of focus group interview</i>	89
<i>Trial of semi-structured interviews</i>	90
<i>Aide-memoire</i>	90
<i>Transcription and analysis of semi-structured interviews</i>	91
<i>Summary and conclusion of the pilot</i>	92
Research schools	92
<i>Rationale for selection of the three schools</i>	92
Ethical issues	95
<i>Communication with the schools</i>	95
<i>Access in the schools</i>	96
<i>Confidentiality/anonymity</i>	97
<i>Researching with children</i>	97
Data gathering methods	98
<i>Focus group interviews with boys</i>	98
<i>Selection of the groups of boys</i>	100
<i>Procedural issues</i>	101
<i>Transcription & analysis of focus group interviews with boys</i>	102
<i>Semi-structured interviews with teachers</i>	106
<i>Procedural issues</i>	107
<i>Transcription & analysis of semi-structured interviews with teachers</i>	108

<i>Comparative analysis of data sets from focus group interviews with the boys and semi-structured interviews with their teachers in Somerview, Estateside and Brooktown, at the end of phase 3.</i>	109
Establishing the reliability, validity & credibility of my research study	110
<i>Procedures to establish credibility</i>	111
<i>Triangulation</i>	111
<i>Prolonged engagement in the field</i>	112
<i>Member checking</i>	112
<i>Sensitivity & reflexivity</i>	113
Conclusion	114
 CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS: SOMERVIEW	116
Introduction	116
Context of the school	116
<i>Approach to teaching literacy</i>	117
Focus group interviews with the Somerview boys and semi- structured interviews with their teachers.	118
Summary of findings from analysis of focus group interviews with Somerview boys and semi-structured interviews with their teachers.	119
<i>The Somerview boys' feelings about school</i>	122
<i>School support for literacy & fairness</i>	124
<i>Home & school support for literacy</i>	126
<i>Reading Response Diaries</i>	127
<i>The Somerview boys' feelings about the classroom</i>	131
<i>Barriers to learning</i>	131
<i>Perceptions of fairness in relation to gender</i>	133
<i>Autonomy & motivation</i>	136
<i>The Somerview boys' feelings about literacy</i>	140
<i>Gendered preferences for school subjects</i>	140
<i>Beliefs about differential performance</i>	142
<i>The Somerview boys' feelings about writing</i>	144
<i>Difficulties with the technical aspects of writing</i>	146

<i>Choice & genre</i>	148
<i>Stamina & longer writing tasks</i>	149
Conclusion & Discussion	151
CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS: ESTATESIDE	154
Introduction	154
Context of the school	154
<i>Approach to teaching literacy</i>	155
Focus group interviews with the Estateside boys and semi-structured interviews with their teachers.	156
Summary of findings from analysis of focus group interviews with Estateside boys and semi-structured interviews with their teachers.	157
<i>The Estateside boys' feelings about school</i>	161
<i>School support for literacy & fairness</i>	162
<i>Home & school support for literacy</i>	164
<i>The Estateside boys' feelings about the classroom</i>	168
<i>Barriers to learning & fairness</i>	168
<i>Perceptions of fairness in relation to gender</i>	170
<i>Autonomy & motivation</i>	174
<i>The Estateside boys' feelings about literacy</i>	178
<i>Gendered preferences for school subjects</i>	178
<i>Beliefs about differential performance</i>	180
<i>The Estateside boys' feelings about writing</i>	183
<i>Difficulties with the technical aspects of writing</i>	185
<i>Choice & genre</i>	186
<i>Stamina & longer writing tasks</i>	190
Conclusion & Discussion	192
CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS: BROOKTOWN	196
Introduction	196
Context of the school	196
<i>Approach to teaching literacy</i>	197
Focus group interviews with the Brooktown boys and semi-	

structured interviews with their teachers.	198
Summary of findings from analysis of focus group interviews with Brooktown boys and semi-structured interviews with their teachers.	200
<i>The Brooktown boys' feelings about school</i>	204
<i>School support for literacy & fairness</i>	205
<i>Home & school support for literacy</i>	206
<i>The Brooktown boys' feelings about the classroom</i>	210
<i>Barriers to learning</i>	210
<i>Perceptions of fairness in relation to gender</i>	212
<i>Autonomy & motivation</i>	214
<i>The Brooktown boys' feelings about literacy</i>	219
<i>Gendered preferences for school subjects</i>	219
<i>Beliefs about differential performance</i>	220
<i>The Brooktown boys' feelings about writing</i>	223
<i>Difficulties with the technical aspects of writing</i>	225
<i>Choice & genre</i>	226
<i>Stamina & longer writing tasks</i>	230
Conclusion & Discussion	232
 CHAPTER 7: MAIN FINDINGS	236
Introduction	236
Stereotypical beliefs related to gender & socio-economic issues	237
<i>Low expectations</i>	239
<i>Lack of self-belief</i>	241
Biased pedagogy	243
<i>Downward learning spiral</i>	243
<i>Upward learning spiral</i>	252
Conclusion and propositions	258
 CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS	263
Introduction	263
Research Question 1: In what ways to boys' school and home experiences influence their attitude to writing?	264

Research Question 2: To what extent do changes in these experiences over time impact on the boys' attitude to writing?	268
Reflections on conducting this research	275
Conclusion and contribution to research	277
Implications for practice and future research	280
Literacy policy in the future	283
REFERENCES	286
APPENDICES	305
1. Example of grid used for transcription of focus group interviews with boys	305
2. Example of grid used for transcription of interviews with teachers	306
3. Example of mind map to analyse focus group interviews with the boys in phase 1.	307
4. Example of mind map to analyse interviews with the teachers in phase 2	309
5. Example of comparative analysis of interviews with the boys and their teachers in Somerview, Estateside and Brooktown at the end of phase 3, for the categories differential performance and fairness.	311
6. Theoretically significant propositions	313
7. Interview guide for use with focus groups of pupils	321
8. Aide-memoire for interview with teachers	322
9. Letter of invitation to Headteachers	323
10. Information sheet for participants	324
11. Letter to parents requesting permission	325
12. Example of analysis of pupil interaction in focus group interviews.	326
INDEX OF TABLES & FIGURES	
Index of Tables	
1.1: Summary of ICT development activities in the three primary schools	16
3.1: School contextual data	85
3.2: School data from RAISEonline 2007	94
3.3: Summary of context of the three schools	95

4.1: Summary of findings from analysis of focus group interviews with Somerview boys and semi-structured interviews with their teachers.	119
4.2: The Somerview boys' feelings about school	123
4.3: The Somerview boys' perceptions of how the school could help them with their literacy.	126
4.4: The support the Somerview boys received in their homes and school for their literacy learning.	127
4.5: Barriers to learning for the Somerview boys in their classroom	132
4.6: The Somerview boys perceptions of the way they were treated by their teachers.	133
4.7: Teaching strategies that motivated the Somerview boys to write	136
4.8: The Somerview boys' preferred school subjects	141
4.9: The Somerview boys' perceptions of girls' and boys' achievement	143
4.10: The Somerview boys' feelings about writing	145
5.1: Summary of findings from analysis of focus group interviews with Estateside boys and semi-structured interviews with their teachers.	157
5.2: The Estateside boys' feelings about school	161
5.3: The Estateside boys' perceptions of how the school could help them with their literacy.	162
5.4: The support the Estateside boys received in their homes and school for their literacy learning.	165
5.5: Barriers to learning for the Estateside boys in their classroom	168
5.6: The Estateside boys perceptions of the way they were treated by their teachers.	170
5.7: Teaching strategies that motivated the Estateside boys to write	174
5.8: The Estateside boys' preferred school subjects	178
5.9: The Estateside boys' perceptions of girls' and boys' achievement	181
5.10: The Estateside boys' feelings about writing	184
6.0: Brooktown boys' teachers	199
6.1: Summary of findings from analysis of focus group interviews with Brooktown boys and semi-structured interviews with their teachers.	200
6.2: The Brooktown boys' feelings about school	204
6.3: The Brooktown boys' perceptions of how the school could help them with their literacy.	205

6.4: The support the Brooktown boys received in their homes and school for their literacy learning.	206
6.5: Barriers to learning for the Brooktown boys in their classroom	210
6.6: The Brooktown boys perceptions of the way they were treated by their teachers.	213
6.7: Teaching strategies that motivated the Brooktown boys to write	215
6.8: The Brooktown boys' preferred school subjects	219
6.9: The Brooktown boys' perceptions of girls' and boys' achievement	220
6.10: The Brooktown boys' feelings about writing	224

Index of Figures

7.1: Negative influences on boys' attitudes towards writing	238
7.2: A downward learning spiral	244
7.3: An upward learning spiral	252

CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Good writing skills are critical for success in the way we communicate today. That boys are under-performing in literacy and writing in comparison to girls, is well documented (OECD, 2001; 2010a & b; DfES, 2007), but the reasons for their underperformance are complex, with some arguing that the focus in the debate on the boys' underachievement has created a false binary dichotomy that has marginalised the girls who are struggling (Jackson, D. 1998; Francis & Skelton, 2005) and masked other issues that can affect underperformance, such as socio-economic disadvantage (Jones & Myhill, 2007) and the kinds of help educators can provide (Martino, 2008; Lingard, et al, 2009; Watson, et al, 2010).

In this study I explore the influences on boys' attitudes towards writing in order to better understand why boys under-perform in literacy in comparison to girls. Some have argued that boys are influenced long before they go to school by their family and friends (Millard, 1997; Murphy & Elwood, 1998; Skelton & Francis, 2003), others have focused on the school as the main site of influence arguing that lower teacher expectations and harsher assessment have led to boys' underperformance (Jones & Myhill, 2004; Elwood, 2006; Jones & Myhill, 2007), while others have focused on the way writing is taught, arguing this differentially affected boys and girls (Grainger, et al 2003; Younger & Warrington, 2008; Moss, 2007). Some have argued that the construction of literacy as female has influenced boys' response to literacy as a school subject (Arnot et al, 1998; Francis & Skelton, 2005) and that boys are influenced by their peers to conform to the masculine culture of their peer group (Epstein, 1998; Holden, 2002). However, the data shows that the underperformance of children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds in comparison to their counterparts from advantaged socio-economic backgrounds is a significant factor in underperformance (DfES, 2007; Twist, et al, 2007; Clark & Dugdale, 2009; Clark & Douglas, 2011) and

is an issue of some import to my study. These writers are considered more fully in the literature review for this thesis.

My background and positioning in relation to this study

My interest in conducting this study stemmed from my experience as a teacher and advisory teacher. I taught for sixteen years in inner city secondary schools, teaching children aged eleven to sixteen. For eight years I taught in a single sex girls' school and for eight years in a co-educational school, with a larger proportion of boys, and where children were drawn mainly from families living in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. I worked as an ICT advisory teacher for ten years, supporting teachers and children in primary, secondary and special schools in a local authority in a large urban area in inner London with high levels of deprivation. These experiences showed me that boys' comparative difficulty with writing in contrast to the girls was not isolated to secondary school aged children, but that boys in primary schools, aged four to eleven, had similar difficulties in settling down and sustaining their writing. Furthermore, my teaching experiences and advisory work highlighted the additional challenges faced by boys from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds who received little or no support from their families at home and often had additional responsibilities, such as caring for younger siblings, which meant they had less time to attend after school work clubs or complete their homework. I was also driven by my own personal experience as a schoolgirl in the 1950s and 1960s, where I found no difficulty in achieving good results in my English classes but had great difficulty in maths, the latter being a subject my family at home were unable to help me with. As a result of my difficulties with a school subject, I recognised many of the avoidance strategies the boys used in the classroom to avoid getting on with their writing because I had used similar strategies to avoid getting on with maths at school. I was also aware of how this avoidance of a school subject can lead to long term difficulties and the additional challenges a lack of competence with maths or English can present to adults in their daily life.

Although my experience of teaching in school classrooms and my knowledge of the schools where I was conducting my research study, were helpful in my communication

with the Headteachers and gaining access to the schools, this also presented a challenge in over-identification with my role as teacher and adviser, something Coffey describes as the path between familiarity and strangeness (Coffey, 1999) and it is to a fuller discussion of this that I now turn.

Between 1998 and 2008 I worked as an ICT Advisory teacher in a local authority in a large urban area in inner London. This work involved me visiting schools in the area and supporting senior and middle managers in the strategic planning of ICT and class teachers in the use of ICT in teaching and learning. The three schools I selected for this research study were in the primary phase and were schools where I have a good working relationship with the Headteacher and are a representative sample of the schools in this local authority. The table below shows a summary of the ICT related development activities, between 2006 and 2008, undertaken by the schools, (the schools names have been replaced throughout this thesis with pseudonyms) and provides a context for this study. Fuller details of the context of the schools and my rationale for selecting them are given in the Methodology Chapter of this thesis.

Table 1.1	Summary of ICT development activities in the three primary schools
Brooktown	- Digital stories to support children's writing
Estateside	- Learning Platform Pilot focused on supporting boys' writing. - Mobile technology pilot with Y4 children to support home/school learning.
Somerview	- Pupil Response Diaries to support Y2 children's reading and writing. - Learning Platform Pilot focused on extending the learning of gifted and talented pupils.

My advisory work with these schools provided me with some insights into the issues they faced in the teaching and learning of writing and how they thought the use of ICT could help them to overcome some of these issues, such as boys' lack of motivation to write. As such, this gave me an insider perspective on the individuals, the groups and the schools as institutions, but on starting the research, I left the local authority and so moved to the role of outsider.

However, as I have shifted back and forth I have had to be aware of the shifting power relations. For example, one of the Headteachers in one of the schools in this research study had previously worked for me as a seconded advisory teacher. In another school, one of the teachers who knew I had been a local authority adviser challenged me because he thought I was visiting the school to impose a new way of teaching literacy. He was reassured when I explained that my role as a researcher was to find out about the teaching and learning of writing in the school and not to impose a teaching method.

Brice Heath & Street (2008:46) suggest that any ethnographer proposing fieldwork needs to ask the question “Who am I with respect to the individuals, the group, or the sites?” They argued that researchers need to be aware of any preconceptions they bring to the research site and of what they called *emic* [their italics] knowledge (the knowledge of those being researched) and *etic* [their italics] knowledge (the knowledge of the researcher engaged in comparative analysis). My own preconceptions relate to the opinions I have formed about the schools from experience of working with staff in my role as ICT adviser. For example, the Headteachers and ICT leaders in the three schools I selected were all positive about the use of ICT as were the great majority of children I talked to when observing them using ICT in their lessons. However, as my role has changed from adviser to researcher, and I am focusing on a different school subject, I have had to suspend any pre-conceptions I have formed about the schools.

Coffey (1999), argued that any researcher not able to stand back from the esoteric knowledge they had acquired would face difficulties when analysing their data. As my role as ICT Advisory teacher and researcher has given me both an insider's and an outsider's knowledge of the schools, and some of the individuals and groups in these schools, I became aware of the need to maintain a high level of critical reflexivity when collecting data in the schools and analysing the data. However, as aptly stated by Erickson in (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993):

“There are unsettling dischords as those voices engage and combine – discrepancies between the stance of insider and outsider, of participant

observer or observant participant. Neither the outsider nor the insider is granted immaculate perception.”

(Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993:ix)

In order to help me to be continually reflexive when conducting my research study I kept a research journal, and I provide a fuller discussion of how I used this in the Methodology Chapter 3 of this thesis.

The purpose of the study

My aim in conducting this study is to explore the factors that help or hinder boys when they undertake writing tasks in their school classrooms. The study focused on boys aged 8 – 11 years during the last three years of their primary schooling. My data are gathered from annual interviews with small groups of boys drawn from three different schools, and complemented with individual interviews with each of their teachers. Most importantly, the children's own voices, particularly the boys, provide a lens through which to explore their attitudes towards writing and to identify some of the influences that shape those attitudes. The research is conducted in three phases between 2008 and 2010 with the same cohort of children as they progress through Y4, Y5 and Y6 in their primary schools. Phase 1 of the study takes place in the summer term of 2008, phase 2 in summer 2009 and phase 3 in summer 2010. In order to attempt to increase the validity of such a limited study, I selected three primary schools in very different socio-economic areas, within one inner city local authority. The schools, whose real names have been substituted with pseudonyms, are: Somerview – an average sized primary school in an area of wide social and cultural diversity whose pupils are mainly of White British heritage; Estateside - a smaller than average school where most pupils come from areas which are more economically disadvantaged than most and Brooktown - a large primary school serving an ethnically diverse community where most families live in low cost housing, are asylum seekers and refugees and whose children arrive in nursery with very limited language, communication and social skills. Within this context, my primary purpose was to have a contrasting data set, which enabled me to explore the impact of the boys' socio-economic background on their development as writers over the three years of this study.

I now move on to describe a study focused on raising boys' underachievement in literacy, from which I drew inspiration, and focusing in greater depth on the underlying reasons for boys' underachievement.

Raising Boys' Achievement (RBA) Study

The RBA was a large-scale study, conducted with over fifty primary, secondary and special schools in England over a four-year period (2000 – 2004) (Younger, et al, 2005). The main purpose of the RBA study was firstly to: find originator schools that had narrowed the gender gap and identify the strategies they had used to raise the attainment of boys and secondly to: partner these schools with two other schools in a triad to share good practice. In the primary phase of the study the focus was on raising boys' attainment in literacy at KS2 and, as such, both the phase of education and the subject, was relevant to my research study. The conclusions from the primary literacy aspect of the RBA study were that certain pedagogical strategies, such as response partners and the use of ICT for writing, contributed to raising boys' achievement in literacy, but that this was only effective when the strategy had the support of the leadership in the school and the commitment of all staff (Younger, et al, 2005). However, the key difference between the RBA study and my research study relate to the aims of the studies. Whereas the RBA study was designed as an intervention study focused on identifying, evaluating and sharing good practice within groups of schools in order to raise boys' achievement, my study is designed to identify and assess the factors, which contribute more generally to children's attitudes to writing and is not linked to specific intervention strategies. As such I have been able to extend the findings of the RBA study by exploring in more depth the influences on boys' attitudes to writing and how these change over time (a fuller discussion of my findings in relation to the findings of other studies is given in the Findings and Discussion Chapter 7 of this thesis).

The RBA teams' wealth of experience in researching with children in the field of literacy and gender has been very useful in planning and implementing my own research study and I have sought to build on their approach. This research team used a

variety of research instruments, one of which I adapted for my own study, the focus group interview schedule. Being able to draw from more experienced researchers than myself contributed to reducing the amount of time I needed to spend on creating and testing my research instruments (a fuller discussion of how I adapted the focus group interview schedule are given in the Methodology, Chapter 3 of this thesis). I now move on to briefly introduce my approach to this research study and the research methods I used.

Research approach

The approach I used to conduct my study is a qualitative one. I draw from the principles of grounded theory, to give me a framework for conducting my research, along with procedures and techniques for analysing my data. I chose this inductive approach because I wanted to gain a better understanding of the complexity of the social influences on the boys rather than a more focused deductive approach which involves stating a hypothesis and then testing it to see if it is correct.

I used two different research methods to collect data from the children and their teachers, focus group interviews and semi-structured interviews. To find out the boys' views I used focus group interviews, comprising four to six boys, which involved me asking questions from a pre-prepared interview schedule while also encouraging discussion between the boys within the group, to enable me to gain some insights into their feelings about writing. I interviewed the teachers on a one-to-one basis, using a semi-structured approach, which enabled me to explore the themes I am interested in, and provided opportunities for the teachers to give me their perspective on the issues they face.

To analyse my data for this thesis I used a constant comparative method, comparing and contrasting data from my two main data sources, collected from the three schools in the three phases of my study, to identify points of convergence and conflict. I also drew from social interaction research when analysing the interactions between the boys in the focus group interviews. Throughout this process I have been continually critically reflective, refining my assertions in the light of new data. As a result I have

been able to draw, from this small study, some modest findings to contribute to the debate about the influences on boys' perceptions of themselves as writers and their attitudes towards writing.

Research questions

As previously mentioned, I wanted to explore the factors that help or hinder the boys when they undertake writing tasks in their school classrooms. In the light of this I formulated two questions to frame my research. These are:

1. In what ways do boys' school and home experiences influence their attitude to writing?
2. To what extent do changes in these experiences over time impact on the boys' attitude to writing?

In order to respond to the first question for this thesis, I conducted focus group interviews with small groups of boys and individual interviews with their class teachers in the three different primary schools. To respond to the second question I conducted repeated interviews with the boys and their teachers annually over a period of three years.

Timeliness of the study

My study is timely because over the period 2011 to 2012 the U.K. Government was in the process of undertaking a review of the National Curriculum in England for 5 – 16 year olds and this provides an opportunity for me to contribute my findings, in particular relating to issues of equality and inclusion, an issue cited as part of the review (DfE, 2011:3). The four key themes that emerge from my study are:

- gender and socio-economic beliefs;
- self-belief;
- expectations;
- pedagogy.

These themes, and the way in which they affect boys' attitude towards writing and their underperformance in comparison to girls are fully discussed later in this thesis and highlight the need for a re-examination of the way boys, particularly those from disadvantaged socio-economic groups, are positioned in relation to literacy.

Outline of thesis

This thesis contains eight Chapters. In Chapter 2: Literature Review, I review the literature and discuss the key issues in the debate about boys' under-achievement in literacy in comparison to girls and explore the different interpretations and perspectives. My review is organised around a number of themes as shown below:

- Children's attitude to writing
- The gender gap in children's literacy achievement
- Gender issues in relation to boys aged 8 – 11 years
- Socio-economic issues in relation to children's literacy achievement
- The teaching and learning of writing in school classrooms
- The role of self-belief and motivation in children's literacy learning

These themes have provided a framework for me to explore more broadly the key themes of: gender and socio-economic beliefs; self-belief; expectations and pedagogy, that emerged throughout my study. In Chapter 3: Methodology I give an account of my research methods and procedures used to collect and analyse my data, along with a rationale for their selection. I also give fuller details of the contextual information of the three schools where I conducted the study which were situated in a large urban area in inner London with high levels of deprivation. In Chapters 4, 5 and 6: Findings: Somerview, Estateside and Brooktown, I provide a detailed analysis of the data I collected from the interviews and a discussion, drawing on the relevant literature, of my findings illustrated with extracts from comments made by the boys and their teachers. In each data Chapter I provide summaries of my analysis of the data in order to identify similarities and differences between individual boys, their teachers and

changes in the data over time. In Chapter 7: Main Findings, I bring together and discuss my main findings from each of the three schools in this study and summarise the main influences on boys' attitudes towards writing in the form of schematic and spiral diagrams. In Chapter 8: Conclusions & Implications, I respond to my research questions and discuss how my own findings contribute to the research literature on boys and writing and offer some suggestions for future research and the implications for classroom practice.

Following this introduction, in Chapter 2: Literature Review, I review the literature relating to boys and literacy and the influences on their attitudes to reading and writing.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This literature review identifies some of the key issues within the debate about boys' under-achievement in literacy in comparison to girls and explores the different interpretations and perspectives. This underachievement has been identified over many years (Gorman, et al 1988; Ofsted, 1993; DfES, 2007). The period covered by this literature review is the last 25 years (1985 – 2010). The early part of this period is crucial because there were a number of major Government policy changes at this time. The National Curriculum for English (influenced by the outcomes of the National Writing Project, 1989) was introduced into schools in KS1 in 1989 and KS2, KS3 and KS4 in 1990. The National Curriculum provided, for the first time, an entitlement for all pupils in England to a defined curriculum. Other major policy changes included the National Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs) tests, which tested children in English at the end of Key Stages 1, 2 and 3, and the National Literacy Strategy, introduced into English primary schools in 1998. These policy changes resulted in changes in the curriculum and teaching of English in primary and secondary schools in England and changes in children's responses to learning to read and write in schools (Grainger, et al, 2003; Moss 2007; Tymms & Merrell, 2007).

Against this background, this literature review is organized around a number of themes. These themes cover some of the key issues in relation to boys and writing and the key issues emerging from the three phases of the research conducted for this thesis. These themes are:

- Children's attitude to writing
- The gender gap in children's literacy achievement
- Gender issues in relation to boys aged 8 – 11 years

- Socio-economic issues in relation to children's literacy achievement
- The teaching and learning of writing in school classrooms
- The role of self-belief and motivation in children's literacy learning

A number of writers have identified links between negative attitudes to writing and lower achievement (Gorman, 1988; Ofsted, 1993; Millard, 1997; Ofsted, 2003; Moss, 2007; Tymms & Merrell, 2007; Clark & Dugdale, 2009). Some pointed to the influence of the teacher in shaping boys' attitudes to writing (Ofsted, 1993) and perceptions of themselves as writers (Gipps, 1999; Jones & Myhill, 2004; Elwood, 2006; Paechter, 2007), the home and school cultures as influential (Millard, 1997; Epstein, 1998; Murphy & Elwood, 1998; Holden, 2002; Paechter, 2007) and wider society (Skelton & Francis, 2003). However, others have pointed to the influence of children's socio-economic background and unequal access to educational resources in their homes (Clark & Hawkins, 2010), in the school they are able to attend (Ball, Bowe & Gerwitz, 1996; Hamnett & Butler, 2011) and in the way they are perceived in their classrooms by their teachers (Kress, 1994; Gipps, 1999; Paechter, 2007).

Others have been critical of the National Literacy Strategy and suggested that changes in teaching approaches have had a negative impact on boys' attitudes to writing (Grainger, et al, 2003; Moss, 2007; Tymms & Merrell, 2007). Some have reported how changes in pedagogy can improve boys' motivation to write (Czerniewska, 1992; Warrington, et al, 2003; PNS/UKLA, 2004; Passey, et al, 2004; Westwood, 2008). Others argued that where pedagogical changes reflected a whole school approach to teaching and learning this led to whole school improvements (Stoll & Fink, 1996) and improvements in children's self-belief, motivation and performance in writing (Younger & Warrington, 2005). However, both National and International data have consistently shown that boys achieve less well than girls in literacy in England in primary and secondary schools and in a significant number of other countries around the world, and children from disadvantaged socio-economic groups achieve less well than their counterparts and this is consistent over time (DfES, 2007; Twist, et al 2007).

There has been an ongoing debate over the last 25 years about how children need to be taught to write in schools. Different approaches to writing have dominated at different times, for example the process approach in the 1980s (Czerniewska, 1992) and the

genre approach in the 1990s (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Wray & Lewis, 1995 & 1997). There has also been a debate as to whether the skills of writing need to be taught directly (Hall, 1999; Medwell & Wray, 2007), taught in the context of other work (Cordeiro, et al 1992; Carter, 1997; Bourassa & Treiman, 2007) or discussed with children as and when it is needed (Wyse & Jones, 2001). Others argued that there was a lack of a theoretical conceptualization underpinning the pedagogy of English teaching and that more emphasis needed to be given to writing as a social practice (Myhill, 2005). These approaches have also been susceptible to political change with the introduction of the National Curriculum for English in 1989/1990 and later the National Literacy Strategy in 1998 (Twiselton, 2007; Turvey, 2007; Gibbons, 2008).

I will now move on to explore the literature on measuring attitudes to writing and draw on some of the large-scale attitude surveys, which have been conducted in both the U.K. and the U.S.

Children's attitude to writing

I will begin this literature review with a discussion of the issue of a lack of a common definition in educational research of the concept of attitude (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). I will then identify research studies on children's attitudes to writing conducted in England (Gorman, et al 1988; Clark & Dugdale, 2009) and the U.S.A. (Knudson, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1995; Kear et al, 2000) and the issue of comparing different research studies into attitudes to literacy over time when different research instruments have been used (Twist, et al, 2004). I will then highlight some of the factors, which have been said to shape children's attitudes towards literacy, in particular boys' attitudes towards writing.

Defining and measuring attitude

Fishbein & Ajzen, (1975) suggested there was ambiguity and confusion in research into attitudes partly because the concept of attitude was used as an explanatory concept in diverse areas of investigation, and that this ambiguity led to different results being obtained when different measures of attitude were employed. Their definition of

attitude was: “*As a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favourable or unfavourable manner with respect to a given object...*” (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975:6; emphasis in original), and that although people may respond slightly differently on different occasions to the same stimulus, their behaviour could be considered to be consistent if both were located on the same side of the favourable or unfavourable dimension. Further, it was suggested that an attitude held by a person would guide or influence their behaviour and this predisposition to respond was a result of past experience. However, a distinction was made between beliefs, attitudes, intentions and behaviours:

“Beliefs are the fundamental building blocks in our conceptual structure. On the basis of direct observation or information received from outside sources or by way of various inference processes, a person learns or forms a number of beliefs about an object. That is, he associates the object with various attributes. In this manner, he forms beliefs about himself, about other people, about institutions, behaviours, events, etc. The totality of a person’s beliefs serves as the informational base that ultimately determines his attitudes, intentions, and behaviours.” (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975:14)

It was suggested that individual beliefs were also subjected to normative pressures, which consisted of normative beliefs (beliefs that people think that they should or should not behave in a certain way) and the motivation of an individual to comply. The conceptual framework outlined by Fishbein & Ajzen (1975) resonates with my own emerging conceptual model of the influences that shape boys’ attitudes to writing, outlined in the Introduction, Chapter 1 of this thesis.

I now move on to examine the results of three attitude surveys, the Assessment of Performance (APU) and the National Literacy Trust (NLT) surveys conducted in the U.K. and the Knudsen survey conducted in the U.S.

APU

The first National detailed enquiry into pupils’ attitudes to writing in England at primary level occurred as part of the 1980 Assessment of Performance (APU) survey (Gorman, et al, 1988). The APU was set up in 1975 within the Department of

Education and Science to provide information about general levels of performance of children at school and how this changes over the years. The surveys were conducted annually in England, Wales and Northern Ireland to monitor the performance of populations of 11, 13 and 15 year old pupils in maths, language, science and design and technology from 1978 to 1989. There were ten language surveys between 1979 and 1983 (five with pupils aged 11 and five with pupils aged 15). Pupils were randomly selected from schools in England, Northern Ireland and Wales. The surveys included information about children's attitudes and preferences and also involved the collection of written work from everyday classroom situations. In 1982 and subsequent surveys, pupils were asked to complete a separate questionnaire related to attitudes to writing. Pupils were asked to respond in two ways. They were asked to write extended answers in response to some open-ended questions, explaining and illustrating their attitudes to writing and their views of themselves as writers. In another section of the questionnaire they were asked to say whether they agreed or disagreed with statements reflecting different attitudes and views about writing. All ten of the surveys found girls achieved significantly higher mean scores than boys in writing, indicating that girls had more positive attitudes towards writing than boys, with the findings of the separate questionnaire also showing differences between boys' and girls' attitudes to writing. A summary of these findings is shown below:

- Boys were more likely than girls to endorse statements expressing reluctance to write or lack of confidence in writing. For example, significantly higher numbers of boys agreed with statements indicating that they found difficulty in organizing writing time and in the management of the written language.
- Boys and girls differed significantly in their preferences for types of writing. For example, boys preferred factual writing arising out of specific projects and girls preferred letter writing and poetry. (summarised from Gorman et al, 1988).

It was suggested that boys' poorer performance may be attributable to their preference for factual over fiction books which meant they lacked experience of reading in this genre, which led them to withdraw from language activities in which they did not shine, such as using language for exploratory or reflective purposes. Further, it was suggested that it was possible to show that children's attitudes had a bearing on

performance, though this was not always a direct one, and that many factors besides a positive disposition towards writing, or towards a specific writing task, had a role to play in accounting for achievement. Further, pupils' perceptions of themselves as writers and their feelings about the utility and value of reading and writing were strongly influenced by their experience at school and at home (Gorman, et. al, 1988). The latter are themes I will return to throughout this Chapter.

NLT

A survey on children's attitudes to writing was conducted on behalf of the National Literacy Trust (NLT) in 2009. This consisted of an on-line survey of 3,001 pupils aged 8-16 from England and Scotland. The children were asked a range of questions aimed at exploring their views about writing. The survey showed that girls had more positive attitudes towards writing than boys and children aged between 8-11 and 14-16 had more positive attitudes towards writing than children aged 11-14. The survey also found that: children enjoyed writing for family/friends more than they enjoyed writing at school, they liked to choose what to write about and they liked using computers because they could correct their own mistakes and present their ideas clearly (Clark & Dugdale, 2009). A second on-line survey of reading and writing, conducted on behalf of the NLT, completed by 17,089 pupils aged between 8 - 16 in 112 schools in the U.K. also found that girls had more positive attitudes to writing than boys, and children who were less good at writing had more negative attitudes towards writing (Clark & Douglas, 2011). Both these surveys also found a link between children's socio-economic background and their self-reported confidence as readers and writers. Issues relating to children's socio-economic background, in relation to their attitude to literacy, are discussed in more depth later in this Chapter.

Knudson

In the U.S.A. an attitude survey was developed, initially for use with children in grades 4 to 8 (Knudson, 1991) and subsequently for use with children in grades 1 to 3 (Knudson, 1992). Knudson used the survey to assess the effects of ethnicity in attitudes towards writing (Knudson, 1993) and the relationship between attitude and achievement in children from grade 1 to grade 6 (Knudson, 1995).

The Knudson (1995) attitude survey asked 19 questions grouped into four areas: motivation to write; self-evaluation of writing competence; preferred pedagogy and preferred genres (Knudson, 1995:96). These questions were worded slightly differently for children in grades 1 to 3 and in grades 4 to 6, however, each of the 19 questions covered the same topics so that comparisons could be made between different studies. Through these research studies, Knudson found that there was no significant effect of ethnicity, younger children had more positive attitudes towards writing than older children, girls had more positive attitudes towards writing than boys and children with more positive attitudes to writing tended to be better writers. Knudson concluded that: "Grade level, gender, and attitude toward writing are very good predictors of writing achievement." (Knudson, 1995:90). It was argued that because anxiety about writing negatively affected school success and writing competence was critical for school and career success, more research needs to focus on finding out about children's experiences in school and how their attitudes towards writing develop (Knudson, 1995).

Kear et al (2000) were critical of Knudson's research instrument and suggested the surveys did not have norms and teachers could only make limited comparisons within individual classes of children. Kear et al addressed this issue by first piloting their questionnaire with a group of children and then only including the questions for their survey which were identified as having high reliability. Although the questions selected by Kear et al for their survey covered the same areas as the Knudson survey (motivation to write, self-evaluation of writing competence, preferred pedagogy and preferred genres), there was less balance between the number of questions covering each aspect and a particularly heavy focus on genre.

Issues in measuring attitude

The issues associated with different scales to measure attitude were raised by Twist et al, (2004), in the context of a discussion of children's reading attitudes in England reported in the Progress in International Reading Literacy (PIRLS) study. Twist et al selected three reading attitude studies, conducted in England between 1979 and 2003, beginning with the large-scale Assessment of Performance survey and two other

smaller scale projects, and showed how difficult it was to compare studies over time, concluding that: "The review of various attitude surveys in England since the APU in 1979 has shown that the variety of items used in the surveys makes it difficult to ascertain if attitudes have changed." (Twist et al, 2004:398). Further, it was suggested there was a need for an attitude measurement instrument, with data collected at regular intervals on a scale large enough to identify trends over time (Twist et al, 2004).

I concur with Twist et al, and suggest that given the continuing issue of boys' underachievement in writing relation to girls (Shepherd, 2009), there is a need for a National survey of children's attitudes to writing, in order to identify factors that impact negatively on boys' attitudes to writing, in order to inform future research studies and intervention strategies.

This examination of the literature on children's attitude to writing has focused attention on some of the key issues in both defining the concept of attitude, and measuring changes in attitudes over time. It has also highlighted some of the main themes in the debate about boys' attitude to writing, such as gender, socio-economics, pedagogy and self-belief, which are of relevance to my research. I now move on to examine the literature relating to the gender gap in children's literacy achievement.

The gender gap in children's literacy achievement

I begin this section with a review of some of the key studies (PISA, 2000: Programme for International Student Assessment (OECD, 2001); PIRLS, 2006: Progress in International Reading Literacy Study; DfES, 2007). The PISA and PIRLS surveys focused on reading rather than writing. However, it has been argued that there was a clear link between children's involvement with literary texts and their development as writers and that children learned many things about how writing worked through the attentive reading of literature and its discussion in their classrooms (Barrs & Cork, 2001). This finding echoed the findings from my own research study and is discussed more fully in the Findings and Discussion Chapter of this thesis.

PISA

The PISA 2000 study assessed more than a quarter of a million 15 year old students in 32 countries (28 of which were OECD countries and included the U.K.) in 2000 on their reading, mathematical and scientific literacies. The PISA 2000 survey found that in all of the 32 participating countries, there was a gender gap in favour of girls, in reading literacy (OECD, 2001). Even though my research study focuses on primary age children, the cumulative impact of all the learning experiences at home and primary and secondary schooling can be seen in the outcomes for 15 year olds, and may therefore, provide some useful insights into the factors that contribute to the development of children's competencies. Looking at the gender gap for the U.K., the PISA 2000 findings showed, alongside the majority of countries, the gender gap in literacy was statistically significant but was smaller than the OECD average (OECD, 2001).

Reading literacy was defined in PISA 2000 as: "... the ability to understand, use and reflect on written texts in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential, and to participate effectively in society." (OECD 2001:21). The focus was on 'reading to learn' rather than 'learning to read'. Students were expected to:

"... demonstrate their proficiency in *retrieving* information, *understanding* texts at a general level, *interpreting* them, *reflecting* on the content and form of texts in relation to their knowledge of the world, and *evaluating* and *arguing* their own point of view." (OECD, 2001:22; emphasis in original).

The PISA 2000 report found girls showed greater interest in reading than boys, while the reverse was true in the case of mathematics. The report found that student interest in the respective subject areas was mirrored in the differences in their performance in reading and mathematical literacy. It is suggested that this revealed inequalities between the genders in the effectiveness with which schools and societies promoted motivation and interest in different subject areas and that as some countries had lower gender gaps than others, it was possible to provide a learning environment or broader context that benefited both genders equally (OECD, 2001). The PISA 2009 report,

once again, showed there was a gender gap in reading literacy and that this was wider than in mathematics and science, with girls outperforming boys in reading in all of the 65 participating countries, by an average of 39 PISA score points, equivalent to one year of schooling, and including the U.K., where the mean score in reading was not statistically significantly different from the OECD average (OECD, 2010a & b). However, although the gender gap in reading skills in England is not significantly different from other countries, this is not the case for the socio-economic gap, where children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds in England are two years and four months of schooling behind their counterparts from more advantage backgrounds and England is ranked 23/32 countries. Further, for high achieving boys, the socio-economic gap is bigger in England than other developed nations (on average), with England ranked 31/32, and where high achieving boys from disadvantaged backgrounds are 2 years and 6 months behind their counterparts from more advantaged backgrounds (Jerrim, 2013). This is of considerable import to my study.

PIRLS

The PIRLS 2006 study assessed the reading attainment of samples of 10-year-old students in 41 countries (approximately 4,000 students in each country) in 2006. The study is repeated every five years and the first one took place in 2001. The PIRLS study found that in almost all participating countries, including England, there was a gender gap in favour of girls in reading literacy (Mullis et al, 2007).

Reading literacy was defined in PIRLS 2006 as:

For PIRLS, reading literacy is defined as the ability to understand and use those written language forms required by society and/or valued by the individual. Young readers can construct meaning from a variety of texts. They read to learn, to participate in communities of readers in school and everyday life, and for enjoyment. (Mullis et al, 2007)

PIRLS 2006 identified two purposes for reading and four comprehension processes. This four-stage process identified is similar to Myhill's three-stage definition of

composition, which involved planning (retrieving ideas and information and the formation of a pre-verbal message), translation (from pre-verbal ideas to text on a page) and reviewing (judging and evaluating ideas or texts) (Myhill, 2009). The assessment students were given in PIRLS 2006 included a variety of passages that students encountered in their everyday experiences inside and outside school. Three of these passages were literary and three were informational. More than half the questions were in a form that required students to generate and write their own answers. (Mullis et al, 2007:2). The PIRLS 2006 report found that in almost all countries, including England, girls achieved significantly higher mean scores than boys. With regard to reading purposes, internationally and in England girls scored significantly higher than boys in reading for both literary and informational purposes and on reading processes, girls scored significantly higher than boys on both the retrieval and straightforward inferencing scale and also on the interpreting, integrating and evaluating scale (Twist et al, 2007).

With regard to attitudes, the PIRLS 2006 reported:

Attitudes to reading of 10 year old children in England are poor compared to those of children in many other countries, and have declined slightly since 2001. Girls are generally more positive than boys. In England and most other countries, there is a positive association between attitude to reading and reading attainment (Twist et al, 2007:v).

The PIRLS 2006 report for England showed that girls were significantly more confident in their reading abilities than boys and children in England tended to report reading for pleasure less frequently than their peers in many other countries. PIRLS 2006 found a strong association between the amount of reading for pleasure children reported and their reading achievement (Twist et al, 2007). With regard to factors associated with reading attainment, PIRLS 2006 found there were strong negative associations between social deprivation and performance on PIRLS assessments. It was also found that performance in reading and writing at age seven was positively associated with PIRLS reading attainment (Twist et al, 2007). A crucial issue of debate, highlighted by the PISA and PIRLS studies, concerns the gender gap in favour of girls in England and internationally in primary and secondary schools; the greater

interest in reading for pleasure shown by girls, and their resulting higher literacy achievement in comparison with boys; and the findings from PIRLS, regarding the negative association between reading attainment and social deprivation.

Although the PIRLS 2011 report showed reading achievement for children in England since the PIRLS 2006 report, was improving, there was little reduction in the gender gap, where in reading achievement “in nearly all of the countries and benchmarking participants, girls outperformed boys in 2011, and there has been little reduction in the reading achievement gender gap over the decade.” (Mullis, et al, 2012:7). Further, the report found that higher achievement on PIRLS 2011 was associated with students attending schools where a greater percentage of students were from relatively affluent socio-economic backgrounds, spoke the language of PIRLS as their first language and entered school with early literacy skills (Mullis, et al, 2012).

Gorard (2004) discussed the perils of comparing international data. He suggested that international league tables could encourage policy makers to lose sight of the issues within their own countries, and to concentrate too much on improvements relative to other countries. He also suggested that such comparisons were not straightforward, because policy makers were not comparing like with like, as the cultural contexts being compared were very different. For example, within different education systems there were huge variations in age ranges, curricula, motivation and forms and times of assessment and that education was not compulsory in some countries, which meant a large proportion of the age cohort was missed out. Gorard also pointed out that as the differences between males and females were universal, it was unlikely this was the result of culturally specific, or pedagogic changes because the differences occurred in very different education systems (Gorard, 2004).

DfES

The DfES Report on gender and education suggested that the gender gap in English, measured by the SATs tests and GCSEs, was wide and indicated that boys achieved less well than girls from the Foundation Stage through to GCSE, with the largest gap at key stages 3 and 4 (15 and 14 percentage points respectively). This was in contrast to the very small gender gaps in maths and science (-3 to +3 percentage points) (DfES,

2007). However, the DfES report highlighted that gender was not the strongest predictor of attainment. The socio-economic attainment gap at Key Stage 4 (as measured by percentage point difference in attainment between those eligible and not eligible for free school meals (FSM)) was wider than the gender gap. The FSM classification is the system used by the DfES. I will return to the influence of children's socio-economic background when exploring the reasons for children's underachievement later in this Chapter.

Gorard, et al (1999) was critical of the use of percentage point scores used to measure children's achievement, because percentages and percentage points were often used to mean the same thing, and this could cause confusion when data sets were compared. Nevertheless, taking account of this issue, it was found that between 1992 and 1997, there were no systematic gaps in favour of either gender at any level in mathematics or sciences, but there was a significant gap in favour of girls in English at the higher levels at all key stages, and this was constant over time (Gorard et al, 1999).

Responses to the gender differences in test results

Gipps & Murphy (1994) questioned the validity of subject knowledge testing, and suggested that differences in achievement could be created by particular approaches to subject knowledge and the way it was tested. They suggested that changing the structure and content of the test could change the pattern of results (Gipps & Murphy, 1994). Gorard (2004) suggested that the idea that boys were once ahead in the UK, and that girls had overtaken them was a commonly held myth. He pointed to the increase from approximately 2% to 10% in the gender gap in 1988/9, when GCSEs replaced CSE and GCE; with an increase in coursework, change from norm-referencing to criterion-referencing and changes in the way results were recorded and published. DfES (2007) also identified the introduction of GCSEs replacing O-Levels as a possible reason for the marked drop in boys' achievement of 5 A*-C GCSEs starting in 1988 (DfES, 2007). Gorard argued that there was a need to recognise that boys and girls may be differently, but equivalently literate and that school assessment systems needed to be reviewed and possibly changed in the light of this (Gorard, 2004). However, Jones (2007) challenged the notion that boys and girls were differently literate and was critical of changes in pedagogy to reflect the perceived

preferences of boys. Jones found no differences between boys and girls in terms of their composing processes or in the linguistic characteristics of what they wrote. She concluded that explanations of differences must be attributable to other aspects of performance such as motivation, testing mechanisms or teacher assessment and expectations (Jones, 2007). These are issues I return to later in this Chapter.

This examination of the findings from National and International studies has shown that boys achieve less well than girls in literacy, and that this gender gap is not isolated to England, but can be found in many other countries internationally. Most importantly, it has highlighted a crucial issue of debate, which concerns girls' and boys' reading habits and the link between girls' greater interest in reading and their subsequent higher literacy achievement and the strong association between reading attainment and social deprivation. Furthermore, it has pointed to some of the issues involved in drawing conclusions from test results, about differences between boys' and girls' achievement, and drawn attention to some of the wider reasons for the differences, such as the testing mechanism and pedagogical approaches. I now move on to an exploration of the debate about gender and achievement in relation to boys aged 8 – 11 years.

Gender issues in relation to boys aged 8 – 11 years

I begin this section with a consideration of some of the theoretical perspectives underpinning the explanations of gender and achievement. This is followed by an exploration of the different factors that have been said to influence boys' attitude to writing, in particular the boys' experiences at home and school and the influence of stereotyping on the boys' perceptions of themselves as writers. Finally, I examine some of the findings from research studies that have reported how teachers have challenged gender stereotypes in order to raise the literacy achievement of boys.

Theoretical perspectives on gender and achievement

Arnot et al argued:

“Despite a resurgence of interest in biological explanations for psychological phenomena in recent years, it is now generally acknowledged that such explanations are unlikely to provide an adequate account of gender differences in academic performance, and especially of changes in the patterns of male and female achievements.” (Arnot, et al,1998:56).

It has been suggested that people viewed the issues around gender and achievement differently depending on their views of the nature of gender, this means whether people thought sex difference was inherited and natural or socially constructed, or a mixture of the two (Francis & Skelton, 2005). In order to help understand the position adopted by different researchers in the field of gender and educational achievement, Francis & Skelton outlined nine theoretical perspectives, three of those most relevant to this research project have been summarised below:

Theories of brain difference	Gender differences in behaviour reflect the biological differences between men and women.	Used to argue that boys and girls inevitably have different learning skills and abilities and these are produced by the differences in their brains.
Social constructionist theory	Meaning and identities are socially situated and constructed through social interaction.	Researchers have explored the impact of group dynamics on classroom behaviours and the relationship between such behaviours and educational outcomes. It is maintained that boys and girls endeavour to construct their gender identities in ways that are deemed most appropriate or desirable to their peers, and in the values of society at large.
Post-structuralist discourse analytical perspectives	Texts can be interpreted in multifarious ways and there were no fixed truths or meanings.	Researchers have been less concerned with the truth or extent of the gender gap than with examining the discourses that produced gendered arguments, for example, analysis of the policy and media writing on the perceived underachievement of boys.

(Summarised from Francis & Skelton, 2005:14-35)

Francis & Skelton, however, held slightly different perspectives on gender and achievement. Skelton argued that gender was predominantly socially constructed, but recognised that brain theories offered some potential explanation for boys' underachievement in literacy, whereas Francis supported the view that gender was completely socially constructed. Skelton cited research that found there were differences in the way cognitive abilities were organised within each hemisphere of the brain, and that this could have explained why girls were better at some things than boys. Francis commented that there was no evidence to suggest that the slight tendencies to difference in the brain were related to gendered patterns in educational achievement, and argued that in even very young children gendered abilities and interests could be explained by social factors, and that these trends were exacerbated as they grew older.

Gender stereotyping

Some have argued that the focus on boys' underachievement in the debate about boys' and girls' achievement in literacy, has essentialised boys as an undifferentiated underachieving group and this has created a false binary dichotomy that has marginalised the girls who are underachieving (Jackson, D. 1998; Francis & Skelton, 2005), and failed to take account of other issues such as socio-economic disadvantage (Jones & Myhill, 2007) and pedagogical practices that can help (Martino, 2008; Lingard, et al, 2009; Watson, et al, 2010). Additionally, Jones & Myhill (2004) and Myhill & Jones (2006) argued that the focus on the underachievement of boys had influenced the way teachers viewed boys and girls in their literacy classrooms, and this is discussed more fully later in this Chapter.

Jackson (1998) and Francis & Skelton (2005) argued that the continued focus by the government and the media on the underperformance of boys in comparison to girls drew attention away from broader questions about effective teaching and learning, and could have become a self-fulfilling prophecy, which had a negative impact on boys' performance. Jones & Myhill (2007) argued that boys had been positioned as less successful writers in the late twentieth century, just as girls were positioned in the eighteenth century as having accomplishments in language domains not as intellectual advantages, but as testimony to their innate inferiority to men. They suggested that the

perception of boys as less successful in literacy could have contributed through teacher expectations to their under-performance. For example, they found that teachers were tougher in their written criticism of student's writing when they believed the author was male. They suggested the discourse of difference was unhelpful as a lens through which to consider both boys' and girls' writing and argued for a different approach.

In the writing classroom, a post-structuralist stance would recognise and encourage multiple, diverse, and shifting practices in being a writer, and would eschew the deficiency discourse of difference that casts boys as failing, struggling writers.

(Jones & Myhill, 2007:477)

Jones & Myhill (2007) suggested that an avoidance of the discourse of difference might draw teachers' attention to girls who struggle with writing. They also suggested that the case for boys' under-achievement had drawn attention away from other factors, such as socio-economic disadvantages, that contribute to underachievement.

Similarly, Martino (2008), Lingard, et al (2009) and Watson, et al (2010) argued that the essentialising boys as a homogeneous group had masked issues such as sexuality, race, ethnicity and disability. Furthermore, they questioned taken for granted pedagogical approaches that assume boys to have common interests and learning styles, and did not acknowledge individual differences and argued that the focus should be on which girls and which boys need help and the kind of help educators can provide. These are issues of some import to my study.

Influence of home on children's aptitudes towards school subjects

Many writers have argued that although research findings have shown sex differences in boys' and girls' intellectual abilities, with girls doing better on verbal abilities and boys doing better on mathematical problem solving, these differences were most likely to be a result of the different early socialisation processes experienced by boys and girls at home and school (Millard, 1997; Murphy & Elwood, 1998; Skelton & Francis, 2003).

Millard suggested that boys and girls were influenced long before they entered school,

by the adults who surrounded them and their friends, about the kinds of behaviour that were appropriate to their role. "The fact that boys and girls position themselves very differently in relationship to the literacy experiences provided by schools is central to my argument." (Millard, 1997:30). Millard suggested that the toys children were encouraged to play with associated with writing activities, such as desks and toy briefcases, were targeted at girls rather than boys, and that this encouraged girls to write before they entered school. Once children entered schools, Millard suggested that they were then subject to the values of the school and these values, openly or covertly, embodied society's values. She suggested that the school promoted versions of literacy that could be shown to hold more appeal for girls than boys. For example, in using particular methods of presenting reading and writing and particular media of instruction, teachers were not just developing pupils' technical competence, but were also influencing children's attitudes about who might be expected to read or write and those who were most successful at it. Other researchers have suggested that boys perceive the literacy experience as female because, from an early age, reading and writing are associated with feminine forms of expression, especially the exploration of personal experience and feelings in stories and poetry (Arnot et al, 1998).

Murphy & Elwood (1998) found that parents' expectations differed for boys and girls, and these different expectations were reflected in the activities and toys they provided for their children; that these early experiences influenced boys' and girls' pastimes and interests, and this affected the way they responded to school, with boys oriented towards structures and mechanical activities and girls towards using pencils and drawing. In school it was found teachers exploited those interests, with the best intentions, to motivate and engage children. However, this in turn served to narrow children's experiences, which disadvantaged boys when they were learning to write, because they found it harder to access reading schemes for young children and had less-developed skills with using pencils. It was suggested that teachers needed to take more account of the interests and learning developed outside of school, and of how those experiences influenced attitudes to, and learning in, school subjects (Murphy & Elwood, 1998). Skelton & Francis, (2003), argued that the strongest period of gender construction was when children were between 4 and 5 years of age, and were strongly influenced by their families, local communities, nursery workers, primary teachers and images transmitted through the media (Skelton & Francis, 2003).

Influence of classroom culture on boys' attitude to writing

A number of writers have pointed to the classroom culture as an influencing factor in how children perceive themselves as learners in the classroom (Ofsted, 1993; Gipps, 1999; Jones & Myhill, 2004; Elwood, 2006).

Between 1988 and 1991 Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), in the course of their normal inspection activities, carried out an inspection of boys' work in English in the secondary years. The main aim was to identify teaching approaches that improved boys' attitudes towards English, and their performance in the subject. In their subsequent report in 1993, HMI identified boys' negative attitudes towards English as an area of concern. In particular they found boys showed instrumental attitudes towards writing accompanied by problems with motivation and lack of engagement with writing tasks (Ofsted 1993).

“Boys do not do so well as girls in English in schools. There are contrasts in performance and attitudes towards the subject. The majority of pupils who experience difficulty in learning to write are boys. Boys' results in public examinations at 16 are not as good as girls', and many more girls than boys continue to study English beyond 16.” (Ofsted, 1993:2).

HMI identified the influence of the teacher as the crucial factor in boys' attitudes towards English and their performance in the subject. HMI found that boys received more open and direct criticism for weaknesses in written work than girls. For example, they found that some high achieving boys were given feedback of a harsh nature and some low achieving boys experienced over sensitive correction of writing and dismissive comments about the quality of presentation and spelling. In comparison, HMI found that girls were rarely treated in such an obvious manner (Ofsted, 1993).

Jones & Myhill (2004) conducted a study that found 80% of the 36 teachers they interviewed held stereotypical views about children that led to a deficit model of boys' achievement. Gipps (1999) found that where pupils and teachers did not share a

common cultural group, this disadvantaged pupils whose achievements were not fully recognised by their teachers. Elwood (2006) found that beliefs about gender influenced how pupils were assessed and judged by their teachers. Jones & Myhill (2004) found that teachers viewed boys as more troublesome and girls as more compliant, and that their perceptions were not differentiated by achievement. For example, there was a tendency for teachers to construct all boys based on the low achieving boy and all girls based on the high achieving girls, which led to teachers failing to take account of the complex needs of individuals. Jones & Myhill (2004) argued that underachievers often had more in common with each other than with those with whom they shared a gender. Gipps (1999) suggested that boys were more likely to challenge a teacher's assessment whereas girls tended to enter into discussion and negotiate. In the context of mathematics teaching, Walkerdine (1989) found that teachers' valued boys and girls' performance differently based on their learning styles, with rationality, imagination and elegance of solution, competences associated with male styles of work, valued more highly by teachers and that this had a negative impact on girls' performance in mathematics.

Elwood (2006) suggested that teacher-pupil relationships were complex and problematic, and that the relationships and interactions had major implications for how pupils were assessed and judged by their teachers. Elwood argued that within the practice of formative assessment, gender would significantly influence teachers' evaluations of boys' and girls' achievements and successes. She suggested that when classrooms were viewed as cultural settings in which pupils participated, it was not possible to exclude in the evaluation of pupils' achievements what they brought to the classroom setting as a consequence of their participation in the myriad of other cultural contexts.

“If we truly wish to take into consideration the socio-cultural contexts of classrooms and learning in which this type of assessment takes place then the gendered nature of students' lives and experiences plays a significant role in determining success in assessment outcomes.” (Elwood, 2006:228).

Other researchers have found the boys themselves exerted pressure on each other to conform in the classroom to their perception of what it was to be masculine (Epstein,

1998; Holden, 2002; Paechter, 2007). Epstein (1998) found that the boys were influenced in school by the culture of their peer group and their desire to fit in. The culture of male peer groups involved boys doing less work, being rough and being heavily competitive at sports activities as opposed to schoolwork and said: in the primary school context, the worst thing a boy can be called is a 'girl'." (Epstein, 1998:103).

Where boys did not fit in with the dominant culture of masculinity in their school they were subjected to verbal abuse from their peers and often achieved acceptance from their peer group at the expense of their own academic success (Epstein, 1998). However, Holden, (2002) found that whereas the teachers believed that gender identity, and particularly boys' understanding of what it was to be masculine, was culturally and socially determined outside the school, the Year 4 and Year 5 (ages 8 – 10) children interviewed for her research study said they thought there were pressures within the classroom for them to conform, such as, some boys did not want to be seen to be too clever and others did not want to be seen to be making too much effort (Holden, 2002). Paechter (2007) argued that children's understandings of their masculinity and femininity were constructed relationally, that is they were influenced by their school based peer group, older children, the school as a disciplinary institution and their own collective understandings.

With regard to children's perceptions of gender equity both boys and girls were found to believe that their teachers treated the boys more negatively than the girls (Holden, 2002; Myhill & Jones, 2006; Alexander & Hargreaves, 2007). The teachers in Holden's study said they thought some of the reasons the boys underachieved in English was because they had poor writing skills and poor behaviour. However, the boys and girls interviewed agreed that while boys did tend to exhibit poor behaviour, they felt the boys received an unfair amount of negative treatment and that teachers were more likely to pick on boys. The interviews with children also revealed that while the low achieving boys found writing difficult, this was not the case with the high achieving boys (Holden, 2002). Myhill & Jones found that both boys and girls had a strong and significant perception that teachers treated boys more negatively than girls. They also found this perception increased with age and it was suggested this could be related to a developing awareness of gender identity. With regard to

responsibility for the problem, it was found the boys tended to frame the problem in terms of injustice whereas the girls blamed the different treatment on boys' poor behaviour. Myhill & Jones (2006) argued that if pupils' perceptions of inequity were a true reflection of classroom practice, then there was a need to address social justice in the classroom and the gender stereotypes which underpinned those inequities. The interim report of the U.K. Primary Curriculum Review, *Community Soundings*, included interviews with children to find out their views (Alexander & Hargreaves, 2007). When asked to characterise good teachers, children gave great emphasis on equity and empathy. However, the researchers noted that children perceived a gender bias in the behaviour of their teachers and said: "Male teachers pick girls because they think girls are brighter; female teachers pick boys." (Alexander & Hargreaves, 2007:15). The researchers indicate that this perceived gender bias by the children was worth investigating further as a possible general tendency (Alexander & Hargreaves, 2007). However, a large-scale study by Carrington, et al, (2008), with Y6 children and their teachers, concluded that there was no evidence that male teachers enhanced the performance of boys or female teachers enhanced the performance of girls. However, they did point out that more research was needed to identify the impact of gender role models on younger children as they progressed through their primary school years.

It seems to me that a contested point here is whether the school, home or wider society exerted the strongest influence on boys' perceptions of themselves as learners and the impact this has on their attitudes and subsequent achievement in writing, an issue of considerable import for my thesis.

Strategies to challenge gender stereotypes

I will now turn to a number of studies which report how teachers and teacher educators have challenged gender stereotypes in order to raise achievement of boys (Francis, et al, 2002; Warrington et al, 2003; Younger & Warrington, 2008).

Francis, et al (2002) conducted a review of the research into equal opportunity interventions relating to gender in primary schools with children aged 5 to 11 years, aimed at reducing gender stereotypical constructions among primary school children in the U.K. The generalised summary conclusions were:

“The key effective strategies reported included single and mixed-sex group work to provide an experimental space or to tackle gendered behaviours; and discussion and development of reading materials to engender reflection on gender roles. Findings highlight the importance of a committed and long-term approach on the part of intervention providers, and the benefit of gaining support from the institution as a whole (including powerful figures, such as the headteacher and other teachers). Adequate resourcing appears essential for the success of the interventions. Some researchers also pointed to the necessity of consideration of factors other than gender, such as social class, ethnicity and school location. Hence a holistic approach to interventions is recommended, with attention to macro as well as micro issues.” (Francis, et al, 2002)

With regard to children's achievement in writing, Warrington et al (2003) argued that the reasons for differential achievement of boys and girls was due to the different ways boys constructed their masculinity. Their research, with four primary schools, involved exploring ways to challenge stereotypical behaviour and included interventions such as: providing real audiences for writing; creating an opportunity for boys and girls to work together as response partners; and setting up a prefect buddy system. They suggested that it was possible to challenge the images and culture associated with hegemonic masculinity to enable boys to be more effective in their learning and achievement in school (Warrington et al, 2003).

Younger & Warrington (2008) argued that there was a need to re-activate debates about gender identity and inclusivity within teacher training in the U.K., to reconnect research within the academic community and teaching on teacher training courses. It was suggested that schools and teachers had a crucial role in how gender was constructed and decoded by children, through classroom practices, through language, expectations and behaviour, through ethos and attitude. However, their research study found a lack of specific training on gender issues within teacher training programmes. They found that of 178 primary phase trainee teachers surveyed most believed that primary schools needed to do more to challenge gender stereotypes, but beyond short-term approaches, such as the provision of different subject matter for boys, they lacked awareness of strategies and perspectives which challenged particular gendered expectations. Further, they argued that there was a need to make more provision on teacher training programmes for a discourse on gender issues which gave primacy to

gender equity and gender inclusivity. With regard to challenging gender stereotypes in schools, some cautionary notes have been sounded by researchers. Skelton & Francis (2003) argued that children develop and understand their gender identity as relational, such as a boy would demonstrate forms of behaviour which were opposite of what he observed to be expected from girls and vice versa. They suggested that adults needed to work with children to examine their existing conceptions of appropriate gendered behaviours, in order to provide children with views of acceptable, alternative forms of gender identities (Skelton & Francis, 2003). Paechter (2007) argued that as children created communities of masculinity and femininity partially in opposition to the school, it was important that any intervention programmes to challenge stereotypical understandings and behaviours were not carried out in such a way that it appeared to be another form of school knowledge for children to position themselves against (Paechter, 2007). Carrington, et al (2008) conducted a large-scale study to investigate whether male teachers provided more effective role models for boys in schools than female teachers. Their study found no empirical evidence to support the claims that male teachers enhanced the educational performance of boys and female teachers enhanced the performance of girls. However, they pointed out that their study focused on Year 6 children who were more likely to be taught by male teachers and the most able male and female teachers in the school. They suggested that a longitudinal study was needed to investigate the impact of gender role models on younger children as they progress through their primary years (Carrington, et al, 2008).

This examination of the literature on gender issues has provided an insight into some of the key issues in the debate about gender and achievement. Key to the debate was the issue of negative gender stereotyping, where boys were perceived to be less good at literacy and writing than girls and the impact of this on boys' experiences in their homes, their schools and their literacy classrooms. However, a contested point was whether the boys' home or school exerted the strongest influence on their perceptions of themselves as writers, an issue of considerable import for my thesis. Also highlighted was the role of the school in challenging children's gender constructions and the need for more gender training to be included in teacher education programmes. I now turn to a discussion of the issues relating to children's socio-economic background and the impact of these issues on their literacy learning at school.

Socio-economic issues in relation to children's literacy achievement

A number of researchers have identified a link between children's attainment in literacy and their socio-economic background (Mullis, et al, 2007; Twist et al, 2007; DfES, 2007; Clark & Dugdale, 2009; Clark & Douglas, 2011). Some have argued that children from different socio-economic backgrounds do not have equal access to educational resources either inside their homes (Clark & Hawkins, 2010) or access to the highest performing schools as a result of where they lived (Ball, Bowe & Gewirtz, 1996; Hamnett & Butler, 2011) or which country they lived in (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). Others have argued that children from socio-economically disadvantaged families were not exposed in their homes to the kind of language used in formal writing at school (Kress, 1994) and that this had led to misconceptions on the part of their teachers about the children's abilities (Kress, 1994; Gipps, 1999; Paechter, 2007). Nevertheless, some researchers have argued that where schools intervened to encourage families to get more involved with their children's education, the improvement in relationships between families and teachers led to improvements in children's attitude and performance in school (Jeynes, 2005; Dearing, et al 2006 & 2008).

Socio-economic gap in literacy

The findings from an International study of reading literacy (PIRLS, 2006), in which the reading attainment of samples of 10-year-old students in 41 countries were assessed, indicated there was a gender gap in favour of girls in reading literacy (Mullis, et al, 2006), but, there was also a strong negative association between social deprivation and performance PIRLS assessments (Twist et al, 2007). This was supported by findings from a report on boys and girls' performance in school tests in England, conducted by the DfES, which highlighted that boys achieved less well than girls in literacy but that the socio-economic gap (as measured by children who were eligible for free school meals) was wider than the gender gap (DfES, 2007). Further, two large-scale on-line surveys, involving 3,001 children in England and Scotland (Clark & Dugdale, 2009) and 17,089 children in the U.K. (Clark & Douglas, 2011), conducted on behalf of the National Literacy Trust, found that boys were less positive

about writing than girls but there was also a relationship between children's socio-economic background and their confidence as readers and writers. It was found that children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds (children who received free school meals) were more likely to rate themselves as struggling writers than their counterparts from more advantaged socio-economic backgrounds.

Access to resources

Some have argued that parents of children from different socio-economic backgrounds did not have equal access to educational resources (Ball, Bowe & Gewirtz, 1996; Hamnett & Butler, 2011; Clark & Hawkins, 2010; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010).

Clark & Hawkins (2010), found that children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds were less likely to have a desk and books at home and their lack of exposure to these resources had a negative impact on their attitude towards and performance in reading. Ball, et al (1996), argued that parents of children from disadvantaged socio-economic groups had less access to educational resources than their counterparts from advantaged socio-economic groups and this had been exacerbated by the inclusion of parental choice of school in the U.K. Government's Education Reform Act in 1988. Ball, et al (1996) argued that parents from different social groups interpreted information about the prospective schools for their children differently and that parents in advantaged socio-economic groups were more able to decipher information about what constituted an effective school than their counterparts. As a result, the parents from advantaged socio-economic groups were more able to identify a school for their child that matched their criteria for success in education than their counterparts in disadvantaged socio-economic groups. As a result, it was argued that this served to maintain and reinforce social-class divisions and inequalities (Ball, Bowe & Gewirtz, 1996). Further, Hamnett & Butler (2011), argued that greater parental choice, league tables (published school test results) and Ofsted reports which compared schools, had led to some schools being more popular with parents than other schools and that there were not sufficient popular schools, which meant that some parents were disappointed in not getting their first choice of school. They argued that parents in advantaged socio-economic groups were more able to move close to a school of their choice than parents in disadvantaged socio-

economic groups and this meant that: “geography had ‘become the rationale by which those living in advantaged areas continued to have privileged access to educational resources’” (Hamnett & Butler, 2011:479).

Other writers have explored the impact of geography (the country people lived in) on people's lives, such as health and educational performance, in developed countries (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). They argued that where inequality was high (U.S. and U.K.) as compared to countries where inequality was low (Belgium and Finland), this had a negative impact on children's educational success, but had more significance for children from disadvantaged socio-economic groups.

Culture of the classroom

Others have focused on the culture of the classroom in influencing children's learning and progress in literacy (Kress, 1994; Gipps, 1999; Paechter, 2007). Kress suggested that writing was a medium used by and for the power elites of society and this made it essential to ensure that every child learned to write competently (Kress, 1997).

However, Kress (1994) argued that children from families in advantaged socio-economic groups were exposed to the syntax of spoken language, which was very similar to that of writing, and this gave them a significant advantage when they were learning to write in school classrooms. Kress suggested that, because this difference was not widely acknowledged, teachers were likely to attribute the difference in performance of children from different socio economic backgrounds to differences in intelligence, and this created an additional ‘hurdle in the learning of writing on which many children stumble and never recover’ (Kress, 1994:34). Gipps (1999) argued that children's performance at school was affected by social and cultural background factors, such as poor resources at home and/or school, and a mismatch between the language and culture of the home and school. She argued that formal external testing contributed to cultural and social reproduction and that there was a need for more formative assessment in classrooms. However, Gipps (1999) argued that where pupils and teachers did not share a common cultural group, teachers may not fully recognize the children's achievements when they were engaged in formative assessment, and considerable development was needed to ensure teachers had a better understanding of children's socio-cultural backgrounds. These findings chime with the research

Paechter (2007), who also argued that teachers' ability to empathise with children's different cultural contexts had an impact on their judgements about children, and suggested that teachers were influenced by the extent to which they considered the children they taught to be similar or different from them. She also argued that teachers needed to better understand the impact of classroom practices on girls and boys from different backgrounds in order to help them to succeed at school (Paechter, 2007). Willis (1977), found that where children felt they did not fit in with the culture of the school, they created their own sub-culture and this involved resistance to education, which ultimately had a negative effect on their performance in school.

These findings resonate with the findings from my own study, that boys from different socio-economic backgrounds experienced different school cultures and home influences and this had a significant impact on their attitude to writing and their teachers' expectations of them as writers and this is discussed in more depth in the Findings and Discussion Chapter of this thesis.

Role of the family in children's literacy learning

Some researchers have highlighted the importance of the family in children's literacy learning and argued that schools need to do more to help children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, through more language support in school (Mercer, 2000) and intervention programmes to create better communication with families (Jeynes, 2005; Dearing, et al 2006 & 2008).

Mercer (2000) argued that children who engaged in constructive talk, with their parents, teachers and other children were more able to jointly construct their understanding of language and to deprive children of this was to deny them valuable learning experience as developing thinkers. Mercer argued that schools had an important role to play in teaching children how to engage in discourse in order to:

“ ... extend their repertoire of language genres and so enable them to use language more effectively as a means for learning, pursuing interests, developing shared understand and generally getting things done.” (Mercer, 2000:149).

Mercer argued that the ground rules for effective group talk were rarely taught and that more training was needed for teachers in developing effective group talk with children. However, he pointed to the importance of providing support in school for children who did not have adults at home able to support their learning, in particular, the impact of his training for teachers was most effective in schools which served populations of high socio-economic disadvantage (Mercer, 2000).

Jeynes & Dearing, et al (2006), conducted research in the U.S. as part of the Harvard Family Research Project to explore the impact of family involvement on children's attitude towards and performance in literacy. Jeynes (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of 77 studies conducted in primary and secondary schools in the U.S., and found that the aspects of parental support which most influenced children's achievement was the amount of reading and communicating parents did with children in the home, and the parent's expectations of their children. The findings also indicated that parental involvement programs contributed to increased parental involvement with children in their home (Jeynes, 2005). Other research carried out by Dearing et al (2006), focused on children from disadvantaged socio-economic groups and explored the impact of family involvement on children's literacy achievement in school. The involvement included attending school meetings, visiting and volunteering in the classroom. The findings indicated that although there was an achievement gap between children from advantaged and disadvantaged socio-economic families, where parental involvement was high, the gap was nonexistent. The researchers argued for more to be done to involve families of children in disadvantaged socio-economic groups in their children's school, as they faced exceptional challenges, and argued that this was vital in order to promote the life chances of their children (Dearing et al, 2006). In a later study, Dearing et al (2008) explored some of the reasons for these changes and found that improvements in family involvement in school led to improvements in relationships between the family and the teacher and the child and the teacher, and this in turn led to improvements in children's attitudes towards school and performance in school literacy.

In the U.K. the Extended Services Scheme, which provided out-of-school activities for children, was extended to make additional provision for children from disadvantaged

socio-economic backgrounds. Parents and children were consulted to raise awareness of the range of activities available and to ensure the children selected activities most suited to their needs, and this led to greater parent involvement with their children's school and much improved self-esteem in the children (Hinds, 2010).

This examination of the literature on socio-economics in relation to children's literacy achievement at school has given me an insight into why some children are more successful in schools than others. The key issues related to children's unequal access to educational resources in their homes and at school. Firstly, children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds had less access in their homes to the kinds of literacy related resources that they would be required to engage with at school, such as books and the more formal spoken language they would experience at school. Secondly, parents of children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds had less access to the highest performing schools and this had been exacerbated by a Government policy to provide more choice for parents. Thirdly, in the classroom, where teachers lacked an understanding of children's socio-cultural background, this created an additional barrier for the children because their literacy abilities were often misjudged. However, where the school intervened to establish good communication with families, there was a shared understanding of how best to help the children to succeed in school and this led to improvements in children's attitudes and performance. I now turn to an examination of the literature on the teaching and learning of writing in school classrooms.

The teaching and learning of writing in school classrooms

I begin this section with a discussion of the different approaches to the teaching of writing, the process approach (Czerniewska, 1992) and the genre approach (Wray & Lewis, 1995 & 1997) and the different views on how the technical aspects of writing can be taught, such as grammar (Wyse, 2001; Andrews, 2005; Myhill, 2005). I then focus on the debate surrounding the approach to the teaching of writing underpinning the National Literacy Strategy (D'Arcy, 2000; Moss, 2007) and the role of teacher education in the teaching of writing (Gibbons, 2008; Grainger, 2008).

Historical background on the methods of teaching writing 1790 – 1990

Millard (1997) wrote a history on the methods of teaching writing, spanning two centuries. This historical analysis began in the 1790s where the founder of Sunday Schools for children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds associated writing with dissidence and did not allow writing for these children. Rather, the notion was that children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds were to be trained in the habits of industry and piety. Few changes took place over the next 70 years and by 1862 little more was required of children than to copy the words of others with speed and accuracy and be in obedience to the authority of the text rather than with any ability to express their own ideas. In 1937 the legacy of these approaches continued to influence how teachers taught, and emphasis was still placed on the basic skills of letter formation and handwriting.

The biggest changes took place when comprehensive education was introduced in the 1960s. This abandoned the different curricula for grammar and secondary modern schools and children were given the freedom and guidance to express themselves in their writing. In the 1970s more emphasis was placed on self-expression with the writer in the role of observer (Britton, 1975). This became known as the 'process' approach to writing where children were encouraged to choose their own writing topics, write almost every day, use revision as a natural tool of writing, and learn the mechanics of writing in the context of reading and writing (Graves, 1983). In the early 1980s practices such as the setting up of a writers' workshop within the classroom, supported by writing conferences, collaborative writing, and response partnerships were encouraged (Millard, 1997:34-36). These later ideas were taken further through the introduction of the National Writing Project, created in 1985 by the School Curriculum Development Committee (later replaced by the National Curriculum Council), which ran until 1989. This project helped shape the National Curriculum English Working Party's view on independent writing, where stress was placed on children's independent writing, self-expression and creative engagement (Millard, 1997:34-36).

Process and genre approaches to teaching writing

Czerniewska (1992) argued that children do not learn to write in a vacuum, but rather their concept of literacy is culturally constructed and shaped by political and ideological factors, so that some are more highly valued than others. For example, a heavy focus on correct spellings alongside the notion that correct spellings were the key to success could inhibit children's attempts at writing. Further, the skills of writing ought not to be taught in isolation, but in context.

“.... you can give pupils more control over the writing process by enhancing the writing curriculum so that topics are pupil led, audiences and purposes are real, and the skills of spelling and handwriting are developed through editing of their own work.”(Czerniewska, 1992:116).

Czerniewska argued that when children were writing in context for a real audience and purpose, this gave them the opportunity to model the processes of adult writing, such as discussion of their topic, taking notes, drafting, revising, editing and publishing writing. This approach was based on the process approach, where teachers and children would see writing as a craft rather than a set of separate skills to be taught and learned.

In the 1990s, a number of writers raised concerns that the process approach did not sufficiently extend children's writing beyond the basics, and questioned the assumption that just providing children with a range of opportunities to use their writing skills would, in fact, extend their writing skills (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Wray & Lewis, 1995 & 1997). Cope & Kalantzis were responding to what they saw as failings within the Australian progressive curriculum in the 1970s and 1980s, which they argued left too much to chance and did not provide a structure for children to write effectively. Drawing on work from Michael Halliday and J.R. Martin (Halliday & Martin, 1993), Cope & Kalantzis argued not for a return to specific isolated grammar teaching, but for an approach, described as a genre approach; which focused on the social function of the whole text rather than parts of speech, where children would be encouraged to analyse critically the different social purposes that inform patterns of regularity in language, in order to understand the different textual

conventions. Furthermore, it was argued that children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds needed explicit teaching of different genres more than others because it was less likely they would encounter these at home (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993).

In the U.K. Wray & Lewis (1997) raised concerns about the limited amount of non-fiction material children in primary classrooms were given to read and the limited range of genres they were given to write in. It was found that children were mainly given fiction texts to read and were rarely given the opportunity to use writing to argue a case, express opinions or to draw conclusions. Teachers' lack of in-depth understanding of the development of literacy and a lack of curriculum development strategies and resources to support children's non-fiction writing were cited as reasons for children's lack of engagement with non-fiction texts for reading and writing purposes.

“Children are given much more access to fiction texts to read, and are encouraged to write largely in fictional forms. Because children's diets are relatively meagre in terms of non-fiction, teachers get a much-reduced opportunity to work out for themselves strategies for supporting interactions with non-fiction texts or for making judgements about criteria for and levels of success in these interactions.” (Wray & Lewis, 1997:17).

Wray & Lewis argued that children need to be given more opportunities to engage in a wider range of non-fiction writing, such as report, explanation and persuasive writing, through different curriculum subjects. Further, it ought not to just be left to chance that children know how to write in different genres if they are not taught to do this. Wray & Lewis suggested schools needed to help teachers to develop knowledge about language, its structures, functions and variations and of the teaching of writing. To support the schools in this, Wray & Lewis developed, through the EXEL project, a range of strategies, approaches and curriculum materials (Wray & Lewis, 1995 & 1997).

It seems to me that a contested point here is whether to give children choice over their writing topics and leave the range of writing genres to chance, whether to plan for and directly teach a full range of non-fiction writing topics, or whether to create a balance

between the two, something of considerable import for my thesis.

Teaching the technical aspects of writing

I will now turn to an examination of the literature on teaching the technical aspects of writing (grammar, spelling, punctuation and handwriting) and will begin with the debate about the teaching and learning of grammar.

Grammar

In the late 1980s and early 1990s (1989 – 1992) the Language in the National Curriculum (LINC) Project was set up. This was a government-funded initiative to provide training for service teachers in Knowledge About Language (KAL). Carter (1997) argued that KAL was the kind of language study that went beyond the technicalities of learning grammar and developed critical awareness and analytical skills:

“This kind of language study is not mere naming of grammatical parts for their own sake. The aim is to develop tools for talking and writing about language, which encourage a critical awareness and, beyond that, a powerful capacity to analyse particular linguistic forms as they are used within a broad conception of culture. There is a metalanguage but it is introduced as needed, in context. It is not taught for its own sake but to provide an economic and precise way of discussing particular functions and purposes.” (Carter, 1997:22)

Carter (1997) argued for a middle way between, what he called old-style grammar teaching (grammar taught for its own sake out of context), and the counter position of no grammar at all. He suggested that old-style grammar teaching denied opportunities for children to explore grammar and disempowered them from exercising conscious choice and control over language, which would enable them to use language more discriminatingly. The LINC materials consisted of materials for teachers and children in teaching and learning grammar in context and also contained material to help children with correct spelling, and to help teachers understand the complexities of the English spelling system. The LINC project materials were not acceptable to the UK

Government and were denied publication (Carter, 1997).

Wyse (2001), in the context of the National Literacy Strategy, was critical of evidence given to support the 'Grammar for Writing Initiative', (DFEE, 2000a) which provided specific teaching materials and training for primary teachers to teach grammar. He argued that a focus on grammar teaching would not lead to improvements children's writing, rather, it would serve to de-motivate children where it was used as a focus for teaching at the expense of other aspects of writing, such as "choice over independent extended writing projects, bookmaking, poetry workshops, writing inspired by environmental features and artifacts, collaborative projects, cross-curricular art based work, multimedia authoring ... " (Wyse, 2001:422).

Andrews (2005) argued that there was no evidence that knowledge about grammar was a useful tool in helping school pupils to write more fluently and accurately. He suggested that such knowledge may help in the analysis of writing, and that this analysis may help in the subsequent production of writing, but there was no evidence to confirm this. However, he did suggest that teachers would benefit from a rich knowledge of grammatical constructions in that they would be in a better position to help young writers. Further, Andrews et al, (2004) and Andrews (2005) argued that sentence combining was a more effective means of improving the quality and accuracy of children's writing than a top down approach which involved formal grammar (syntax, parts of speech). Andrews et al (2004) argued that further research was needed to move beyond studies of formal grammar and its effects on compositional skills, to take into account the textual and contextual factors in learning to write, in order to find out what works.

Myhill (2005) argued that there has never been a critical theorization of how grammar might support the development of writing, and our understanding of the cognitive and social process involved in learning to write was still developing. She suggested that debates about the teaching of grammar had been polarized, between, on the one hand, direct teaching of grammar and on the other the teaching of grammar in context. She suggested this had not been helpful in finding out how grammatical knowledge might support an effective pedagogy for the teaching of writing, and that it ought not to be

assumed that teaching in context automatically leads to good teaching. Writing as a social practice was given more emphasis by Myhill. She argued that writing was not just about an act of transcribing and encoding thoughts into words on a page, but that writing was a social practice and as such children need to make connections between grammar and meaning. Teaching children how to make effective and appropriate grammatical choices was a skilled task and she suggested that the training of English teachers was inadequate to prepare them for the task (Myhill, 2005). In order to try to address the issue of a lack of a theoretical conceptualization underpinning the pedagogy of English teaching, Myhill (2005) articulated three principles, namely: writing as a communicative act; linguistic choices in creating relationships with a reader; making connections between reading experiences and what is written and how it is written, which she suggested ought to be at the heart of a theory of how grammar might support the teaching of writing. Locke (2006) suggested that Myhill had taken the middle ground with her theory by developing a pedagogy that enabled students to develop a metalinguistic awareness about linguistic choices in an overall view of writing as a social practice. Nevertheless, in a study to investigate whether the explicit teaching of grammar in the context of writing impacted on the quality of students' writing, Myhill found that "effectively embedded grammar teaching can have a significant impact on student writing performance" (Myhill, 2011:4).

Punctuation

Cordeiro et al (1992) evaluated the impact of teaching punctuation to 6 year old children within an activity-centred classroom where children were encouraged to view themselves and their classmates as individuals who had thoughts and ideas worth communicating to others, and who understood that writing was an aid in communication (Cordeiro et al, 1992). Cordeiro drew from the work of Quirk & Greenbaum (1973), to express the purpose of punctuation in English to be:

"Segmentation of words into units by periods, commas, and so forth, and identification of units such as possessive ending (and not a plural) by an apostrophe. Quotation marks share both functions – both separating and identifying direct speech (Cordeiro et al, 1992:86; emphasis in original)

Cordeiro et al (1992) suggested that periods (full stops) caused particular problems, and it was found that children needed to be re-taught full stops more often than other punctuation conventions, but children who were not taught to use full stops, and gained their knowledge from other sources (published texts or their own intuition) did as well as the children who were taught to use full stops directly. Cordeiro et al suggested that children's invented punctuation served a useful purpose and did not lead to bad habits, but were gradually replaced by closer and closer approximations to the adult system. A key question raised by Cordeiro et al, was at what point in this progression the children benefited most from explicit teaching. It was suggested that where explicit teaching was used, it needed to include explanations of punctuation marks based on meaning and function (the meaning of belonging and of what someone says and the function of where a writer wants a reader to stop). However, it was pointed out that because writing was such a complex task, children's attention at one level could divert attention from another level, and make previously demonstrated knowledge temporarily disappear from performance (Cordeiro et al, 1992).

Hall (1999) studied a group of children over a two-year period in classrooms where children were not explicitly taught to use punctuation and where the teachers rarely gave explanations, in their feedback to children, of the linguistic purposes of punctuation (i.e. the principle function of punctuation was not to mark endings, but to demarcate elements of text which have particular kinds of relationship with each other). The language of the children's explanations of their use of punctuation was dominated by the terminology of space, position, distance or length (graphic punctuation). Hall argued, unlike Cordeira et al (1992), that once a schemata for graphic punctuation existed it was not easily dislodged by more linguistic explanations.

Spelling

Bourassa & Treiman (2007) reported that, until the early 1960s, the general view was that spellings could be learned by rote, but as language researchers made links between spoken and printed English and as cognitive psychologists began to see people as active learners, views of spelling development changed.

“It became apparent that children have the ability to actively search for structure in written language. Spelling was increasingly seen as a creative process of symbolizing the linguistic structure of words, not just a learned habit.” (Bourassa & Treiman, 2007:1)

Bourassa & Treiman (2007) argued that there were three types of knowledge, which were required in order to be able to spell effectively. These were: phonological knowledge (understand that the function of alphabetic writing is to represent the sounds of language), orthographic knowledge (the ability to identify all of the phonemes in a spoken word) and morphological knowledge (how certain morphological conventions are reflected in spelling, e.g. the spelling of health is derived from heal) and that children developed their knowledge of these three domains at different times rather than progressing from one to the other. Bourassa & Treiman suggested that their detailed analysis of the three knowledge domains helped practitioners to better understand why children's developmental differences existed, and to identify ways of helping young learners to overcome specific spelling problem, such as drawing children's attention to how context can aid the selection among alternative spellings for a given sound (orthographic knowledge).

Handwriting

Some researchers argued that the specific teaching of some of the skills associated with writing, handwriting for example, had been neglected in recent years (Medwell & Wray, 2007) and that explicit instruction in handwriting could bring about improvements in students' writing and in their motivation and confidence as writers (Westwood, 2008).

Medwell & Wray (2007) drew from the body of research into handwriting to suggest that it was time to reconsider the importance of teaching the skills of handwriting in literacy lessons. In particular, Medwell & Wray point to research, in the domain of psychology, which highlighted the role of working memory in the writing process as being of central importance. It was suggested that if children were skilled in the art of handwriting (the ability to call to mind and write letter shapes, groups of letters and words efficiently and effectively), then more of their working memory would be freed up to focus on composition (the ability to select vocabulary, plan, organise and revise).

However, there has been criticism of using a model drawn from the domain of psychology, where writing was separated into lower-order transcription skills (handwriting, punctuation and spelling) and higher-order self-regulated thinking processes (planning, sequencing and expressing the content), to conclude that teaching strategies and activities needed to be used to ensure all lower-order transcription skills were thoroughly taught and practiced until they could be performed automatically (Westwood, 2008). Westwood (2008) argued that the challenge for teachers was to restore weak writers lost interest and motivation for writing. It was suggested that this could be done through the use of incentives and preferred writing topics, to encourage children to engage more often in writing activities, in order to build their skills and strategies, alongside regular feedback on their writing.

The boys I interviewed for my research study showed they were overly concerned with their handwriting, often complaining of tiredness and aching hands, but when they were motivated to write they were able to transcend their difficulties. This finding was also echoed in the research of Graves (1983). Although Graves argued that placement of the writing paper, arm and wrist placement and pencil grip were important in avoiding aching muscles, he also argued that if children were interested in the topic they would be motivated to write more regularly and would forget about their handwriting problems (Graves, 1983). Other research has shown that although girls were better at handwriting than boys and this could be attributed to more advanced fine motor co-ordination in comparison to boys, it was more likely that cultural stereotypes, where girls were expected to be neater than boys, affected handwriting development (Graham & Weintraub, 1996).

It seems to me that a contested point here is whether the skills of grammar, spelling, punctuation and handwriting need to be taught directly, or taught less formally within the context of other writing activities. Warrington & Younger (2006) found that many boys in the primary schools where they conducted their research study had a restricted view of writing, and argued that there was a complex relationship between teaching writing and how pupils learned to become writers and between writing as a finished product and writing as a process; that over-emphasis on the technical aspects of writing could result in writing that was dull whereas over-emphasis on self-expression could result in writing that was not technically accurate, issues that were of

considerable import for my thesis.

Teaching writing within the context of the National Literacy Strategy

The National Literacy Strategy was established in 1997 by the U.K. Government, to raise standards in English in primary schools and consisted of a framework for teaching focused on direct interactive teaching, and dedicated literacy time in the Literacy Hour. The termly objectives focused on three broad divisions of literacy: word level work (phonics), spelling, vocabulary and handwriting; sentence level work (grammar and punctuation), and text level work (comprehension and composition). Every primary school was recommended to adopt the framework for teaching unless they could demonstrate that their own schemes of work and test performance were at least as effective. (summarised from DFEE, 2000b)

A number of writers have been critical of the approach to teaching writing which underpinned the U.K. National Literacy Strategy (NLS), introduced into schools in England by the U.K. Government in 1998 (D'Arcy, 2000; Hilton, 2001; Wyse & Jones, 2001; Grainger, et al, 2003; Moss, 2007; Tymms & Merrell, 2007).

D'Arcy (2000) argued that there were two paradigms for the teaching of writing, a mechanistic paradigm focused on the technical aspects of writing and a process paradigm focused on the meanings of a text. She argued that the method of teaching writing outlined in the NLS was underpinned by a mechanistic paradigm and that this paradigm alone was not the best way to teach children to write, because it did not provide enough opportunity for children to explore their own thoughts and feelings and to make sense of their learning through writing (D'Arcy, 2000). Hilton (2001) argued that the drive to teach discrete units of sentence grammar proposed for the daily Literacy Hour in the NLS, along with the commitment towards shared and guided writing, would take up too much time, leaving no time for children to engage in extended writing activities, and would lead to lower rather than higher standards of writing "... the constant repetitive structure of the Literacy Hour slowly and inexorably forces them into a highly instructional model which is ... ineffective with students." (Hilton, 2000:9).

However, Wyse & Jones (2001), in their reflections on the impact of the literacy hour in the National Literacy Strategy, suggested that effective primary teachers had always drawn children's attention to the many practical aspects of language use. They suggested that grammar teaching needed to be linked to text-level work as and when appropriate, that children's curiosity about language needs to be encouraged and that it was necessary to use appropriate terminology in the context of daily work (Wyse & Jones, 2001). However, this is in direct contrast to the direct instructional approach underpinning the teaching of writing in the NLS.

Grainger, et al (2003) found children's attitudes to writing dipped between KS1 and KS2, before improving slightly towards the end of KS2, with many more boys than girls in Y5/6 expressing indifferent attitudes towards writing. It was suggested that the reasons for the decline in attitudes could be due to the impact of SATs testing and the increasing demands of the National Literacy Strategy teaching objectives, both of which had led to changes in teaching methods. They found that KS1 teachers, with fewer NLS objectives to cover, had more space and time to provide authentic writing opportunities for children, and teachers themselves perceived they created a better balance between developing knowledge about language and purposeful language use. In KS2 teachers were rarely able to give children freedom and autonomy in their writing and perceived their teaching to be dominated by the demonstration and practice of sentence and word level features of different genres, required by the National Literacy Strategy. This led to children feeling a heightened awareness of the myriad of skills, knowledge and understanding needed to write, and combined with a lack of control over the content of their writing, led to a decline in pupils' positive perceptions of themselves as writers and attitudes towards writing (Grainger et al, 2003).

Although a report on National Standards and Quality pointed to the rising trend of improvement in children's literacy, since the 1980s, it also highlighted a decline in children's attitudes to reading in the upper primary age range, with boys having less positive attitudes than girls; suggesting that the National Literacy Strategy had led to some negative effects, for example, more whole class teaching, leading to less choice and independence for pupils, particularly at KS2 (Tymms & Merrell, 2007).

Moss (2007) explored how children between the ages of 7 – 9 years, in English primary schools, responded to literacy teaching since the introduction of the National

Literacy Strategy and found that delivery of both the reading and writing curriculum had converged into a series of procedural tasks. She argued that children's reading ability had become more visible to the whole class, as a result of the NLS, and that this had disadvantaged boys, particularly boys who were weak readers. She found that boys and girls reacted differently to positioning in the class as a result of being designated weak readers. Girls made more appropriate choice of texts and collaborated and helped each other. Boys sometimes chose texts that were too difficult for them and did not ask for help, but pretended they could read the texts or chose picture-led texts that helped to disguise their proficiency level. Alternatively, the boys avoided reading activities altogether. Moss suggested this could reveal a reason why there was such a large gap between boys and girls' literacy attainment. Moss suggested children were aware of who was most knowledgeable in their class and this influenced the social relations of the class. Boys gained considerable authority from being able to claim to know most, and would prioritise maintaining their place in the social hierarchy rather than admit to what they did not really know. This created a problem for the boys when they were confronted with gaps in their knowledge. By contrast, girls seemed to find it easier to be on the receiving end of help from others with less cost to their self-esteem (Moss, 2007).

With regard to writing, Moss identified a lack of extended writing tasks since the introduction of the NLS literacy hour. Children were given lots of short pieces of writing which, due to lack of time, they often left unfinished. During interviews, teachers revealed they were concerned to get through the volume of Literacy Hour activities and focused on coverage of the literacy curriculum, at the expense of best practice in terms of pedagogy. Moss noted that the boys especially saw this as an opportunity to avoid getting on with their work and not complete their writing tasks on a regular basis. Moss also found that much of the literacy was teacher directed with opportunities for self-directed reading time being diminished. She suggested this could have mattered more in relation to writing where it was hard to develop commitment to the task where there was a lack of autonomy (Moss, 2007).

The teachers I interviewed for my research study, who were using the NLS teaching programme to teach writing, showed they lacked autonomy over their teaching and, in some cases, rarely made provision for children to have autonomy over their writing.

The importance of children's autonomy over their writing was highlighted by Ofsted (2003) in their report on the characteristics of schools where boys wrote well. Ofsted identified the importance of: a balance between teachers' support for pupils and pupils' independence; choice as to the content of writing; purposeful writing tasks; staged writing tasks with feedback and opportunities for pupils to develop their stamina as writers (Ofsted, 2003). However, it would seem that the introduction of the NLS has created fewer opportunities for teachers to make provision for children to have autonomy over their writing (Grainger, et al, 2003; Tymms & Merrell, 2007; Moss, 2007) and this is of considerable import to my study.

The role of teacher education

Some have been critical of the central Government intervention in the teaching of English and the changes in pedagogy and teachers' professionalism brought about by the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy (Turvey, 2007; Twiselton, 2007; Gibbons, 2008) and the National Curriculum (Gibbons, 2008). Gibbons states: "... it is difficult - in the world of league tables, targets and reductive models of assessment - to retain a sense that English teachers have any genuine influence over the direction of the subject." (Gibbons, 2008:123). Twiselton (2007) argued that the impact of the NLS could lead student teachers to become deliverers of a curriculum. However, she suggested that effective teacher training programs could help student teachers to use the NLS as a flexible tool. Turvey (2007) pointed to the added demands of school colleagues, expectations from university tutors and their own beliefs and values influence in influencing student teachers' practice in teaching writing in the classroom. Gibbons (2008) argued that the role of associations such as the London Association for the Teaching of English (LATE) could provide a role in effectively supporting teachers of English to adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of the children they taught. He argued that the wide membership of organizations such as LATE ensured a vibrant exchange of ideas between practicing teachers and educational researchers, and was critical to teachers' ongoing professional development. Grainger (2008) argued that in order to enhance the teaching of writing, student teachers needed opportunities to engage in writing themselves and to reflect on the process. She found that encouraging teachers to engage in the writing process enhanced their self-esteem as writers, improved their understanding of the writing process and enabled them to have

greater empathy with the children they taught in their classrooms. However, Andrews (interviewed by D. Andalo for The Guardian newspaper) questioned whether English teachers were competent to teach writing and argued for a National Writing Project which included training for all subject teachers in six key areas of writing: content; structure and genre; stance; fluency (including structure and grammar); diction (including vocabulary) and accuracy in spelling and punctuation (Andalo, 2008).

This examination of the literature on writing has provided a multi-dimensional picture of some of the key issues in the debate about the teaching and learning of writing in school classrooms. Key to the debate was the issue of the focus for the teaching of writing, such as the process, genre or technical approaches. However, these different approaches were both variable and susceptible to change, and were also politicized, as has been seen with CAL, LINK and the NLS, where the process approach was overshadowed by the technical approach. Furthermore, the domination of the technical approach underpinning the NLS has raised questions about the autonomy of classroom teachers to adapt their teaching approach to meet the needs of the children they teach, an issue of considerable import to my research. I now move on to an examination of the literature on the role of self-belief and motivation in children's literacy learning.

The role of self-belief and motivation in children's literacy learning

I will begin this section with an exploration of the two most commonly used theories of self, self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) and self-esteem (Elmer, 2001, Mruk, 2006). I will then examine a theory of motivation and achievement (Dweck, 2000) and explore the role of motivation in learning to write (Bruning & Horn, 2000) and the role of ICT and motivation in learning to write (Cox, 1997; Passey et al, 2004). I then explore the role of pedagogy and school culture in fostering children's self-belief and motivation (Younger & Warrington, 2005). Finally I examine how theories of self have been used to measure children's perceptions of themselves as writers (Bottomley, et al, 1997).

Self-efficacy

Bandura (1977; 1982), who has been influential in the field, explored the role of self-efficacy in learning and in particular how this influenced the way people behaved in difficult and challenging situations. He defined efficacy to mean a conviction that one could successfully execute the behaviour necessary to produce the required outcomes. Bandura suggested that self-belief was acquired from four sources: performance accomplishments (the way a person interpreted their performance and the most influential of the sources); vicarious experience (produced by observations and comparisons with others and more influential when people were uncertain of their abilities); verbal persuasion (social persuasion – appraisal received from others which could contribute to successful performance when given within realistic bounds) and physiological states (anxiety, stress, arousal, fatigue and mood which could be read by an individual as a sign of vulnerability). Bandura's theory predicted that: "... expectations of personal efficacy determine whether coping behaviour will be initiated, how much effort will be expended, and how long it will be sustained in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences." (Bandura, 1977:191). However, Bandura indicated that expectation alone would not produce desired performance unless it was accompanied by appropriate skills to complete a task. Given the appropriate skills and motivation, he argued that efficacy expectations were a major determinant of people's choice of activities and how successful they were. Bandura argued that performance successes, in turn, strengthened self-efficacy but that perceived self-efficacy was a better predictor of how someone would behave towards an unfamiliar threat than was past performance. He defined perceived self-efficacy to be concerned with judgements of how well one could execute courses of action, required to deal with prospective situations. Bandura argued that people with strong self-efficacy beliefs were more likely to persevere with tasks they found difficult and that perseverance was linked to more positive attitudes and higher performance attainments. Those with weak self-efficacy beliefs were more likely to suffer from stress, which impaired their performance by diverting attention away from how best to undertake the task towards concerns over failings and mishaps (Bandura, 1977; 1982).

Bandura's theory highlights the important role of self-belief in children's learning and the vital role of children's parents and teachers in fostering their self-belief.

Furthermore it helps to explain why some children have less positive attitudes towards their learning and, of import to my study, the difficulties the boys had with persevering with their writing.

Self-esteem

Elmer (2001) questioned whether educational failure led to low self-esteem and/or whether low self-esteem led to lower performance. He concluded that there was a relationship between self-esteem and educational attainment but the strength varied with the: age; educational outcome; sex; ethnic origin and the socio-economic background, of the individual concerned and with the measures of self-esteem used.

However, Elmer drew this conclusion from a number of research studies, which were based on what he called a global definition of self-esteem. This global definition of self-esteem was an emotion based definition (Elmer identified this as worthiness) and did not take account of the other dimension of competence (which is the degree to which an individual is capable of persevering to complete a task successfully). Elmer did accept that when education-specific measures of self esteem were used these related more strongly to attainment than when global measures were used. However, he did not identify what these education-specific measures were nor the research which had used these measures.

Others have provided wider definitions of self-esteem. Mruk (2006) discussed the difficulty of defining self-esteem and concluded that self-esteem could be defined in terms of competence and worthiness and that this definition allowed us to better understand self-esteem. Mruk defined competence and worthiness as:

“Competence thereby includes such things as motivation, self-efficacy, and other aspects of cognitive style, as well as actual abilities, all of which are largely intrapersonal psychological processes. In contrast, worthiness, or simply “worth” as it is more commonly termed in the literature, is more of a feeling than a behaviour, more of an evaluation than an outcome, and it always involves subject appraisals of value.” (Mruk, 2006:22)

Mruk further suggested that there was an important relationship between competence and worthiness because the connection between the two could create or generate self-esteem and could be considered a third dimension.

This examination of the literature on self-belief signals an alert to the need for caution when drawing conclusions from different research studies, because there are not commonly understood definitions of this term, and this has led to conflicting research findings. When I use the term self-belief in this thesis, to analyse and discuss my own research findings I use the term as defined by Mruk as a combination of competence and worthiness.

Motivation and achievement theory

Dweck (2000) conducted research on motivation and achievement over 30 years and argued that: "The hallmark of successful individuals is that they love learning, they seek challenges, they value effort, and they persist in the face of obstacles." (Dweck, 2000:1). However, Dweck argued that children responded to difficulties differently depending on the way they understood intelligence and proposed two theories to account for this. First, the 'entity' theory, that intelligence was fixed and second the 'incremental' theory, that intelligence was something that could be increased through one's own efforts. Dweck argued that children who held the entity theory were more likely to exhibit a 'helpless' response, that carried negative implications for the self and that impaired students' ability to use their minds effectively and this hampered new learning in a classroom situation. Further these children were more focused on measuring themselves from their performance and this could drive out learning goals and lead students to pass up valuable learning opportunities if they involved any risk of errors. Comparatively, children who held the 'incremental' theory were more likely to exhibit a 'mastery oriented' response, that is they did not see failure as an indictment of themselves and so were more able to take risks when learning new things. Furthermore, these children were more focused on learning goals and used deeper more effective learning strategies and applied what they learned more effectively (Dweck, 2000).

Dweck's theory could account for differences in children's responses to learning to write in school classrooms in the context of the greater focus on performance goals as a result of the NLS and SATs testing at age 11 in England. D'Arcy (2000) and Grainger et al (2003) argued that the NLS led to a more mechanistic approach to teaching writing and Moss (2007) argued that these changes in the approach to teaching reading had made children's performance more visible to the whole class and this had disadvantaged the boys, who were less likely than girls to ask for help because of the risk to their self-esteem.

Motivational challenges in learning to write

Bruning & Horn (2000) argued that the extended nature and difficulty of the process of writing created unique motivational challenges. The complexities for writers included:

“... constraints of – topic, audience, purpose, and of physically creating the text itself. They must also switch back and forth among a variety of frames of reference, including critical thinking (e.g., perspective, logic), rhetorical stances (e.g., description, persuasion), and writing conventions (e.g. tone, mechanics, spelling).”
(Bruning & Horn, 2000:26)

In addition, as writing was removed from experience, writers often lacked the context that supported oral discourse and the act of writing exposed a writers thoughts and feelings to much closer scrutiny. Students need to be motivated to start, persist and succeed in the challenging task of writing. It was suggested the motivational challenge was to help students to see that the benefits of writing outweigh the effort and risk. Writers needed to develop strong beliefs in the relevance and importance of writing and learn to be patient, persistent and flexible. Bruning & Horn argued that teachers needed to focus attention in their planning to develop positive motivation in their students for the act and process of writing. They suggested this could be done in four ways: nurturing functional beliefs about writing; fostering student engagement through authentic writing goals and contexts; providing a supportive context for writing and creating a positive emotional environment. However, they argued the teachers own conceptions of writing were crucial to establishing these conditions, because the teacher was the central guiding and nurturing force whose conceptions of writing

provided a model for and shaped students' beliefs, something of considerable import for my thesis.

Nevertheless, in the context of the NLS teaching programme, many researchers have argued that teachers had less autonomy over their teaching, where it was difficult for them to adapt their teaching approach or their teaching methods (Grainger, et al, 2003; Moss, 2007; Twiselton, 2007; Gibbons, 2008).

The role of ICT in motivation and writing

A number of studies have found that ICT has had an impact on improving children's motivation to engage with their work (Cox, 1997; Lewis, et al, 1999; Goldberg et al, 2003; Passey et al, 2004).

Cox (1997) found that children thought that ICT made learning more interesting. Lewis et al (1999) found that the use of spelling and grammar checkers helped children with learning disabilities to reduce the errors they made in their writing and increased their self-esteem. Goldberg et al (2003) found that children who used computers when learning to write were not only more engaged and motivated in their writing but also produced written work of greater length and higher quality. Passey et al (2004) found that teachers widely reported on the motivational impact of ICT use to support children's writing, in particular to make improvements to the quality of their work, and the appearance and presentation. In particular, word processing software was found to help pupils who were disaffected and had low levels of literacy because it allowed them to correct their work without any shame. Passey et al also found that boys were slightly more motivated to use ICT than girls, but suggested that:

“Against a background of findings showing a general educational motivational advantage for girls, this implies that the use of ICT probably has a greater positive effect on boys, while at the same time not disadvantaging girls.” (Passey, et al, 2004:49)

Passey et al argued that the motivational effects of ICT affected the work patterns of boys so that they worked in similar ways to the persistent pattern of girls. These

findings resonate with the findings my own study where the cohort of children, when they were interviewed in Y4, Y5 and Y6, indicated that they were more motivated to write when they were using a computer.

However, Andrews et al (2007) argued for caution in making a causal link between the use of ICT and improvements in children's literacy, and suggested that more needed to be done to theorise the causal and/or reciprocal relationships between literacy and ICT. There has also been negative media coverage of some aspects of children's use of computers, in particular their use of informal language for sending e-mail and text messages (Thurlow, 2006). This was of interest to me because in one of my research schools, the cohort of children had been given access to Q1 handheld computers for writing and the boys I interviewed commented that the aspect of use of these devices which most motivated them was sending e-mails to their friends, where they were able to use their own informal language. In order to investigate whether the informal language children used for sending text messages had any impact on their attainment in written language in school, Plester et al (2008), conducted two studies with ten to eleven and eleven to twelve year old children. The research showed children were more motivated when they were using their own informal language, and this had features in common with both writing and reading. As a result, it was suggested that it was more likely that this would improve children's performance in school writing. In addition the study found that children had no difficulty switching between the register of their own informal language and the formal language of school. The study concluded that there was no evidence that knowledge and use of informal language for sending e-mails and text messages had any negative association with pre-teen children's written language competence. The role of ICT in children's literacy learning is of import to my research.

The role of pedagogy and school culture in fostering self-belief and motivation

Some researchers have argued that individual changes in pedagogy could improve children's motivation and self-belief (Yarrow & Topping, 2001), others argued that an individual teacher was more influential (Pollington, et al, 2001), others argued that changes in pedagogy which reflected a whole school culture of improvement had more impact (Stoll & Fink, 1996; Ofsted, 2009; Younger & Warrington, 2005).

Yarrow & Topping (2001) evaluated a collaborative writing project and found that children who had written in pairs showed improvements in their writing, and had more positive self-esteem as writers than those children who had written alone. Pollington, et al (2001) evaluated two different teaching approaches (one where value was placed on children's autonomy and another where the teacher controlled choice of topic, genre and audience), but found that individual teachers were more influential in shaping children's self-perceptions as writers than were different approaches to teaching writing. The researchers in both these studies used the same scale, developed by Bottomley, et al (1997), to measure children's responses to pedagogical changes in the teaching and learning of literacy.

Stoll & Fink (1996) argued that the culture of the school was significant in enabling teachers to adapt to changing contexts and that where teachers worked collaboratively they were more successful than schools where teachers in a climate of isolation and where failure was blamed on the children themselves or inadequate parenting (Stoll & Fink, 1996). Ofsted (2009) pointed to the important role of the school in building and re-building children's self-belief and identified this as one of eight key characteristics of 20 primary schools deemed to be outstanding despite operating in areas of high socio-economic disadvantage. One of the five success factors common to each of the 20 schools was: "a very positive 'can do' culture where praise and encouragement prevail and self-esteem is high." (Ofsted, 2009:10). The schools cited in the report were all working with children from disadvantaged socio-economic homes, where major barriers to children's success were parents who were disengaged from the education of their children, and children with little motivation to learn and poor self-esteem (Ofsted, 2009).

Younger & Warrington (2005), in their research project with Y5 and Y6 children in England explored whether changes in pedagogy could improve boys' motivation, engagement and performance in writing. Approaches used in the reading project involved greater emphasis on reading as a pleasurable activity and the writing project involved greater emphasis on the process of becoming a writer. They found the impact of these interventions "stimulated boys' interest and engagement as writers and writers, listeners and speakers, but also impacted positively upon their academic

performances in KS2.” (Younger & Warrington, 2005:141). Younger & Warrington also found that the self-esteem of the focus group boys increased, and by the end of Y6 was only slightly lower than that of other children. In particular, they pointed out the importance of paired and group talk which led to pupils showing more confidence, as a result of sharing and exploring ideas before writing, so that they could work out the detail and gain encouragement from others. Younger & Warrington argued that this fostered an ‘*I can do*’ [their italics] belief amongst children which they suggested was especially important with disengaged or unsure children. However, Younger & Warrington argued that improvements in children’s self-belief and motivation were more significant in schools where changes in pedagogy in teachers’ classrooms reflected whole school approaches and where there was “a school ethos which encourages and facilitates achievement in its widest sense.” (Younger & Warrington, 2005:149).

It seems to me that a contested point here is whether an individual pedagogy, an individual teacher or the whole school culture exerted the strongest influence on children’s self-perception as writers, an issue of import for my thesis.

Measuring children’s self-perceptions as writers

Bottomley, et al (1997) argued that though children’s attitudes, values, beliefs and motivation played a significant role in their literacy learning, there were not sufficient and reliable measures to assess children’s self-perception. In order to address this, Bottomley et al developed a Writer Self-Perception Scale, based on Bandura’s theory of perceived self-efficacy, suitable for Grade 4, 5 and 6 elementary school children. The scale was based on the notion that children took four basic factors into account when estimating their ability, included: performance (past success, effort, assistance, persistence); observational comparison (perception of writing performance in relation to peers); social feedback (input about writing derived from teachers, classmates and family members) and physiological states (internal feelings children experience during writing). The scale consisted of 38 items in addition to one general item, which required children to respond to the question “I think I am a good writer”. Children were asked to respond to the items by indicating they strongly disagreed, disagreed, were undecided, agreed or strongly agreed with each statement. Bottomley, et al

suggested that teachers could use the scale to determine how their classroom climate affected children's writing self-perceptions and, in addition, to conduct more specific appraisals of individual children's self-perceptions. The four basic factors underpinning the scale developed by Bottomley et al, have featured in the data gathering techniques for my own research study and this is discussed more fully in the Methodology Chapter 3 of this thesis.

This examination of the literature has highlighted the important role of self-belief and motivation in children's literacy learning. Many of the issues are of direct relevance and import to my research, the construct of self-belief and motivation that has provided an insight into the vital role of these constructs in children's self-perceptions as writers and the way they respond to learning to write in their school classrooms. Furthermore it has highlighted the kinds of pedagogies that can motivate children to write, such as ICT, but has cautioned against drawing conclusions about the impact of a single change in pedagogy on children's self-perceptions without taking into account the classroom climate created by an individual teacher and the culture of the school.

Conclusion

This examination of the literature on children's attitude to writing has highlighted the key issues in the debate about boys' underachievement in literacy in comparison to girls and these were: gender, socio-economics, pedagogy and self-belief, issues of considerable import for my thesis.

The key issue in the debate related to negative gender stereotyping, where boys were perceived to be less good at literacy and writing than girls and the impact of this on the boys' experiences in their homes, schools and classrooms. Some argued the boys were influenced in their homes before they entered school through their early literacy experiences and through parents' differential expectations (Millard, 1997; Murphy & Elwood, 1998; Skelton & Francis, 2003). Others argued the culture of the school classroom exerted the strongest influence on the boys, through teachers' differential expectations, evaluations of children's achievement and treatment of boys and girls in the classroom (Jones & Myhill, 2004; Elwood, 2006). Further, others have argued that

the boys themselves exerted pressure on each other to conform to their perception of what it was to be masculine (Epstein, 1998; Holden, 2002; Paechter, 2007).

However, National and International studies of children's achievement have also identified children's socio-economic background as a significant factor in determining their literacy achievement in school (Twist, et al, 2007; DfES, 2007). Some argued that children had unequal access to educational literacy related resources in their homes such as the more formal spoken language they would experience at school (Kress, 1994) or a desk and books (Clark & Hawkins, 2010). Others argued that parents of children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds had less access to the highest performing schools (Ball, et al, 1996; Hamnett & Butler, 2011).

Furthermore, others argued that where teachers lacked an understanding of the children's socio-cultural background they were often misjudged which created an additional hurdle for some children (Kress, 1994; Paechter, 2007). Nevertheless, some studies have highlighted the importance of good relationships between parents and schools in improving children's attitudes and performance (Jeynes, 2005; Dearing, et al, 2006 & 2008). These are issues of considerable import to my study.

The key issue in the debate about the teaching and learning of writing related to the different approaches to the teaching of writing. Czerniewska (1992) argued that the teaching of writing needed to focus on writing as a craft to reflect the stages in writing, from discussion of a topic to publishing writing rather than a separate set of skills, whereas Wray & Lewis (1995) argued that teaching ought to focus the generic form of writing, such as explanation or report writing, while Carter (1997) argued for a middle way between teaching the technical aspects of writing, and teaching writing in context. However, the politicization of the teaching and learning of writing, such as the introduction of the NLS, has led to the demise of a process approach, as was seen with CAL and LINK, and the dominance of a technical approach embedded in the NLS, of which many writers have been critical (D'Arcy, 2000; Grainger, et al, 2003; Moss, 2007). D'Arcy (2000) argued that the approach was mechanistic and offered too few opportunities for children to make sense of their learning through writing. Although some have argued that teachers were always able to adapt their approach to teaching (Wyse & Jones, 2001) others argued that teachers and children had less autonomy since the introduction of the NLS and this had a negative effect on children's attitude

to writing (Grainger, et al, 2003), in particular the boys (Moss, 2007), an issue of considerable import to my study.

Examination of the theories of self-belief (Bandura, 1977; 1982; Mruk, 2006), and motivation (Dweck, 2000) have highlighted the vital role of self-belief and motivation in children's learning and served to explain why some children respond less positively to their learning in school than others and, most importantly for my thesis, to the difficult task of learning to write (Bruning & Horn, 2000). It has also highlighted the role of ICT in children's motivation to write (Cox, 1997; Passey et al, 2004) and the important role of significant others in fostering children's self-belief and motivation, such as the encouragement children receive from their parents; the feedback they receive from their teachers and the way they perceive themselves in relation to their peers. However, a contested point was the strength of influence on children's self-belief and motivation of an individual pedagogy, an individual teacher or a whole school culture. Some researchers argued that an individual change in teaching approach, such as the introduction of peer partners could change children's perceptions of themselves as learners (Yarrow & Topping, 2001) whereas others argued that it was the individual teacher and the climate they created in the classroom not an individual change of teaching approach which exerted a stronger influence (Pollington, et al, 2001). However, others pointed to the importance of a whole school culture where teachers collaborated to respond to changing contexts, (Stoll & Fink, 1996), where children's self-belief was fostered and developed (Ofsted, 2009) and where changes in teachers' pedagogy in the classroom reflected a whole school approach to teaching and learning (Younger & Warrington, 2005). These are issues of significance to my research study.

I will now move on to discuss the research methods I used to conduct my study in the next Chapter, Methodology.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this Chapter I provide an overview of my research approach, the methods employed to gather the data, the research instruments used to support the data gathering and the procedures used to analyse the data. These instruments and procedures were trialled and adapted in a pilot prior to the start of the research and an explanation of this is given in this Chapter. Furthermore, I give the contextual background of the schools where the research was conducted along with a rationale for the selection of the schools.

The approach used to conduct this research study was a qualitative one. I have drawn from the principles of grounded theory in my research approach, (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), which has provided me with a framework for conducting the research along with procedures, such as constant comparison, to help me analyse my data. The methods employed for gathering data for this research study involved:

- Focus group interviews with small groups of boys when they were in Y4 (age 8/9), Y5 (age 9/10) and Y6 (age 10/11) to explore their attitudes to writing and to identify whether there were changes in their attitudes over time and, if so, what influenced these changes.
- Semi-structured interviews with the children's teachers to explore their views about the teaching and learning of writing, with a particular focus on the issues for boys.

All the pupils included in this research study were in a phase defined by the English Education System as Key Stage 2 (KS2) (children in Y3 to Y6, aged 7 - 11).

The research design was a longitudinal one, where the same children's views were gathered over a three-year period when they were in Y4, Y5 and Y6. The semi-structured interviews with the teachers were designed to gain another perspective on the issues under study.

I now turn to a fuller discussion of research approach I used to conduct my study.

Research approach

There are two broad approaches to conducting a research study, qualitative and quantitative approaches (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Cohen & Manion, 1994).

Some have argued that a researcher's choice of research approach is influenced by their conception of social reality and of individual and social behaviour (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Cohen & Manion, 1994). Lincoln & Guba (1985) argued that these conceptions were underpinned by three assumptions; the first related to reality, and whether this was a given or created in the mind of the individual; the second related to the nature of knowledge, and how it was acquired and communicated; the third related to the relationship between human beings and their environment. They doubted the existence of a single reality, and argued that reality was constructed differently in the minds of different individuals, and there could be an infinite number of different constructions. In order to best understand individual and social behaviour, they suggested it was necessary to study it in context, because it was the context that gave it meaning (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Cohen & Manion (1994) argued that a researcher's view of the social world would influence their choice of methods. The researcher who believed in an external and objective reality would be directed towards a predominantly quantitative approach, which involved methods such as surveys and experiments. Contrastingly, the researcher who believed that the social world was personally constructed would favour a qualitative approach, which involved data collecting techniques such as accounts, participant observation and personal constructs (Cohen & Manion, 1994). As my epistemology is interpretive, and asserts that knowledge is not static but is always emerging and transitional and is interpreted and

exchanged by both observer and participants, I favoured a qualitative approach, where the data were collected by listening to the views of participants through interviews.

Qualitative and quantitative approaches to research also differ in the way theory is developed. Using a quantitative approach a researcher would be more focused on deductively testing hypotheses and theories, whereas using a qualitative approach a researcher would be more concerned with exploring a topic and inductively generating hypotheses and theories. In grounded theory methodology a researcher begins with no pre-conceived ideas or theories to prove or disprove, rather theory is developed through the process of inductive data collection and analysis using constant comparative methods (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This research approach suited my purpose, because although boys' underperformance in comparison to girls in literacy has been well documented (OECD, 2001, 2010a & b; DfES, 2007), I did not have a theory to explain this. Rather, I wanted to gather data from the boys and their teachers in order to better understand the influences on the boys and their teachers, and to generate some insights and theoretical propositions from the data.

Nevertheless, there are different views of theory development amongst researchers who advocate grounded theory methodology (Clarke, 2005; Charmaz, 2006). Strauss & Corbin defined theory as: "Theorising is the act of **constructing** from data an explanatory scheme that systematically integrates various concepts through statements of relationship." (Strauss & Corbin, 1998:25; *emphasis in original*). However, while recognizing the value of grounded theory methodology, some have argued that it is too focused on narrowing down data through coding in the search for theory, and does not focus enough on the complexities, variation and difference of the contexts in which the research study is set (Clarke, 2005; Charmaz, 2006). Clarke (2005) was concerned with the limitations of grounded theory to examine the complexity of data, particularly in multi-site research such as the study I was undertaking, and proposed the use of mapping techniques to help researchers examine variation, difference and conditionality in data. Charmaz's view of theory development emphasizes understanding rather than explanation and argued that: "When you theorise, you reach down to fundamentals, up to abstractions, and probe into experience... although tools may help, constructing a theory is not a mechanical process ..." (Charmaz, 2006:135).

Charmaz argued for a more reflexive approach, and recognised that participants interpret their world as they see it, and that researchers re-interpret the data based on their own past experience and perspectives. As such, in addition to data from transcriptions from interviews, I made constant use of a research journal for my field notes and reflections. In this reflective journal I recorded my growing and changing understanding of my role in interpreting the data generated through my interviews; recorded decisions made, and theoretical justification for, the decisions; with the aim of separating any bias and supposition from my analysis.

Using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to analyse data for my own research enabled me to identify codes and categories that helped to begin to explain larger segments of the data. Drawing on the work of Clarke (2005), the use of mapping made visible the key elements of the situations I was studying across the three different sites, and enabled me to see the interrelatedness of the data and points of variation and difference in different contexts. I then sought to provide explanations for the findings, explain their significance and make tentative connections between explanation and interpretation to make theoretically significant propositions. I moved in and out of analysis and interpretation in a flexible but focused way, reflecting the view of Charmaz, that “grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analysing qualitative data to construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data themselves.” (Charmaz, 2006:2).

I now turn to a discussion of how I approached the analysis of my data and how I adapted the grounded theory method of analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Clarke, 2005; Charmaz, 2006).

Analysis approach

The key idea underpinning grounded theory is that theory evolves during the research process as a result of the interplay between the data collection and analysis phases (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, Strauss & Corbin, 1998). More precisely, “Grounded theory is a general method of comparative analysis” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967:1). As such, this method was ideally suited to my own research study, because I wanted to explore in depth the reasons why boys performed less well than girls, by collecting and

comparatively analysing data from which I could then develop some insights and theoretical propositions to explain this phenomenon. In analysing my own data I have used the procedures and techniques for data collection and analysis put forward by Strauss & Corbin (1998), but have also adapted these based on the work of Clarke (2005) and Charmaz (2006). However, when analysing data from the focus group interviews I also drew from social interaction research, to consider the influence of other boys in the focus group on the responses made by individual boys, and this is discussed more fully later in this Chapter. I now turn to a discussion of using grounded theory procedures and techniques to analyse my data.

Grounded theory procedures and techniques

Strauss & Corbin (1998) suggested that the “*asking of questions*” and “*making of comparisons*” were fundamental to grounded theory methodology which “help to give the concepts in grounded theory their precision and specificity”. (Strauss & Corbin, 1998: 62; emphasis in original). These two procedures, asking questions and making comparisons, were procedures I used to analyse and refine the data for my own research study. Further Strauss & Corbin proposed a three-stage process of coding beginning firstly with what they called open coding, secondly axial coding and thirdly selective coding. This involved Stage 1: initial, open coding, involving an analysis of data by careful word-by-word, line-by line and incident-by incident coding in order to crystallise the participants’ experience; Stage 2: focused coding, involving the identification of the most significant or frequent codes in order to create categories, which make most analytic sense; Stage 3: axial coding, to relate categories to sub-categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) using mapping techniques to show the interrelatedness of the data and to show contextual variation and difference (Clarke, 2005). I included a fourth stage, theoretical coding, introduced by Glaser to “knit the fractured pieces together”, (Glaser, 1978:72) in order to identify the main themes that connect the categories and make some theoretical propositions.

The process of analysing my data from interviews with the boys and their teachers is summarised below:

Stage 1: (initial/open coding) Reading and re-reading my transcribed interviews to identify initial codes and attach labels to them in order to crystallise the boys' and teachers' experiences (examples of coding in transcription grids is given in Appendix 1 and 2 of this thesis).

Stage 2: (focused coding) Identifying categories for the most frequent codes in order to synthesize and explain larger segments of data (examples of coding in transcription grids is given in Appendix 1 and 2 of this thesis).

Stage 3 (axial coding): Creating mind maps to facilitate grouping, re-grouping and cross-referencing of the categories to create sub-categories and to highlight contextual similarities and differences (examples of mind maps are given in Appendix 3 and 4 of this thesis).

Stage 4: (theoretical coding): Comparing and contrasting the two sets of data (focus group interviews with the boys and semi-structured interviews with their teachers, collected annually over a three-year period, from the three schools in my study, in order to identify the main themes which connect the categories and provide some insights and theoretical propositions for the phenomenon under study. An example of comparative analysis is given in Appendix 5 of this thesis.

The data from the semi-structured interviews with the teachers were analysed in the same way to the way as the data from the focus group interviews with the boys. As no new categories emerged from my interviews with the teachers, I used the same categories that emerged from the focus group interviews with the boys in order to aid comparison across data sets. A fuller account of my methods of data collection and how I analysed the data is given later in this Chapter.

In constructing my theoretical propositions I also drew from other contextual data, such as school Ofsted reports and literacy policies, as shown in the table below:

Table: 3.1	School contextual data	
	Ofsted Report	Literacy Policy
Somerview	√	√
Estateside	√	*
Brooktown	√	*

*Requested policy but none made available

Where I have quoted from the school reports and policies to explain contextual differences I have slightly amended the wording in order to protect the privacy of the school. Examples of this can be found in supporting evidence for my five theoretical propositions in Appendix 6.

Throughout this process I have written memos in my research journal in order to capture my thoughts and ideas as they emerged, make comparisons and connections and crystallise directions to pursue (examples of this are given in Appendix 3 and 4 of this thesis). A fuller discussion of how I analysed my two data sources is given later in this Chapter.

Timeline of research study

My research study was conducted annually in three phases over a 3-year period. The data were collected from three primary schools, with a cohort of children as they progressed from Y4 to Y6, using the same methods of data collection each year (focus group interviews with boys, semi-structured interviews with the teachers). The first phase of the main study was preceded by a pilot study. The timeline for this research study is shown below:

Spring term 2008, Pilot Study. This was conducted with a small number of family members and friends and provided me with an opportunity to trial my research methods, research instruments and consider how to analyse the data.

Summer term 2008, Main Study: Phase 1. This was conducted with three primary schools with a cohort of children and teachers in Y4.

Summer term 2009, Main Study: Phase 2. This was conducted in the same schools as phase 1, with the same cohort of children when they were in Y5.

Summer term 2010, Main Study: Phase 3. This was conducted in the same schools as phase 1, with the same cohort of children when they were in Y6.

At the end of each phase of my study, I analysed my data using the methods described earlier in this Chapter.

Pilot Study

The purpose of this pilot study was to:

- assess the adequacy of my research instruments (interview guide for the focus group interviews and aide-memoire for the semi-structured interviews);
- simulate the focus group interview and semi-structured interview with a small number of subjects;
- trial run the digital recording equipment in a simulated situation;
- consider how to analyse the data and identify potential problems.

Most importantly, this pilot study was conducted in order to provide me with a valuable first step to fuller engagement with the research study and the subjects of the research.

Others have argued that the purpose of a pilot study was to contribute towards refining a researchers data collection plans and procedures and testing and developing the adequacy of research instruments (Yin, 1994; Rosier, 1997; Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). Yin (1994) suggested that a pilot study could provide considerable insights into the basic issues being studied, and when used with an ongoing review of the relevant literature, could help to ensure that the study to be done reflects significant theoretical or policy issues as well as relevant questions. Rosier (1997) suggested that conducting

a pilot study was an opportunity to follow the complete cycle of a study before conducting the main research study. Teijlingen & Hundley (2001) suggested that pilot studies were a crucial element of a good study design, however, they point out that conducting a pilot study did not guarantee success in the main study, but it did increase the likelihood of success.

However, although I did consider using the first phase of the data collection for this longitudinal research study as a pilot study, as my instruments for data collection were based on a larger research study, conducted by more experienced researchers I was able to conduct a smaller scale pilot prior to the first phase of my study. The larger study I drew from was the RBA study, a more detailed description of which is given in the Introduction Chapter of this thesis.

I will now turn to an explanation of how I conducted the trial of my data collection instruments.

Trial of focus group interviews

In order to find some participants to trial my focus group interviews I approached my daughter who gave permission for my two grandchildren, aged 10 and 13, to be interviewed and for the interviews to be recorded. Both my grandchildren had been assessed by educationists as dyslexic and had particular problems with writing and spelling. However, they were both happy to take part in the interview and as they had experienced problems with writing, were helpful subjects in terms of testing the sensitivity of my questions. The interview was conducted in a quiet room in my house and my grandchildren were assured that their responses to the questions would be totally confidential. The interview lasted for approximately half an hour and provided me with some useful feedback on the content and form of the questions and some data for a trial analysis.

Focus group interview guide

The interview guide I used in my trial focus group interviews was adapted from two interview guides, which were created by the RBA research team (Younger et al,

2005:159-160). These two interview guides were initially combined to create one interview guide with 20 questions covering: school and achievement; attitude and competence in writing; gender and school support. However, feedback from my two subjects led to some changes in the nature and the content of the questions.

Firstly, it was thought the questions were too long and in some places repetitive and secondly it was considered inappropriate to ask if children thought they were good writers because this was too personal a question and may upset children who were not good at writing. As a result, the interview guide was adapted with shorter questions and the removal of one question with the potential to cause offence. On reflection I found the latter question was not necessary as the information could be inferred from children's answer to the question "Do you like writing"? For example, one response was: "I do not like writing because I am not good at it". My final adapted interview guide contained 18 questions (4 on school and achievement; 7 on attitude and competence in writing; 3 on gender and 4 on school support). The completed interview guide for my research study can be found in Appendix 7 of this thesis.

Recording equipment

The recording equipment consisted of: a MacBook Pro computer, Samson CO3U microphone and Audacity software. I was familiar with using Audacity software on a Mac computer but was unfamiliar with a Samson microphone and therefore it was important to find out how effective the microphone was at picking up the sound of loud and soft voices. A small group of my family members agreed to take part in a simulated focus group interview, which was recorded using this equipment. During the interview the recording equipment worked well but on listening to the recorded interview I noted a number of points. These were:

- 1) Participants needed to face the microphone in order for their individual voice to be heard;
- 2) It was not possible to hear what an individual participant said if two participants talked at the same time;
- 3) It was not always possible to identify the participant who was speaking, particularly if they made a very short contribution.

Identifying these potential problems at an early stage was helpful and could be avoided in future by asking participants to: face the microphone when they spoke; to speak one at a time and to identify who they were when they were speaking.

Transcription and analysis of focus group interview

To transcribe the digitally recorded interview with my grandchildren I listened to the recording of the interviews and typed up their responses, using a grid with the following headings:

Count	Interviewer/Respondee	Questions & Responses	Comments
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This grid enabled me to identify: when the participants were speaking and how long they spoke for; what questions were asked and participants responses to the questions. Additionally, this left space for some commentary on points of interest as I engaged in the process of reading and re-reading the transcript as the first stage in the process of analysis. Even with so little data from only two children some frequently occurring codes began to emerge, such as the importance to my grandchildren of having autonomy over their writing through the use of computers and choice of topic for writing (a sample of a completed grid from the focus group interviews with the boys can be found in Appendix 1 of this thesis).

The process of conducting the transcription and analysis of the interview data also highlighted some issues I needed to consider, which were:

- the transcription process was extremely time consuming and time for this needed to be built into the research study planning;
- the importance of reading and re-reading the children's responses when analysing the data before drawing conclusions.

Additionally, listening to the recordings of my asking the questions and the responses alerted me to the need to give children a little more time to respond between each

question, and for a pause when the focus of the questions changed, such as from a focus on their attitudes towards writing to a focus on their views about gender.

Even though I only interviewed two children, this was helpful in identifying some potential issues, which helped me later when I conducted the focus group interviews in the schools and transcribed and analysed the text.

Trial of semi-structured interviews

In order to trial my semi-structured interviews I approached my daughter and her husband, who were both practising primary teachers, and they agreed to take part in the interviews and for the interviews to be recorded. The interviews were conducted in a quiet room in my house and my subjects were assured that their responses to the questions would be totally confidential. The interviews each lasted for approximately half an hour and provided me with some useful feedback on the content and form of the questions in the aide-memoire and some data for a trial analysis.

Aide-memoire

In order to guide my questioning during the interviews I designed an aide-memoire consisting of questions and prompts covering three broad themes: 'context for writing', 'attitudes to writing' and 'pedagogical solutions'. The aide-memoire consisted of 9 questions based around three broad themes which enabled me to explore the context for teaching writing, children's attitudes to writing and teaching approaches. I also included a question at the beginning of the interview which invited teachers to talk about their own experience of learning to write in order to put them at their ease, which Kvale (1996) suggested would make subjects feel more relaxed and able to talk.

Feedback from my family members indicated that the interview did not flow like a conversation and they suggested some changes to the aide-memoire, which included: re-ordering some of the questions to improve the flow of the interview; provision of more prompts to stimulate responses from participants; inclusion of a question at the end of the interview, inviting teachers to give advice to new teachers about the teaching of writing. I adapted the aide-memoire based on their feedback and added a

warm-up question at the beginning of the interview, as well as a question to close the interview at the end. The addition of the final question was particularly useful, because it provided the opportunity for teachers to talk about issues which they may not have thought about during the interview, but which were important to them and it also helped to bring the interview to a close. Kvale (1996) suggested interviewees might feel tense when talking about some of the issues raised during the interview and therefore it was important for an interviewer to close the interview sensitively. The completed aide-memoire for the semi-structured interviews with the teachers for my research study can be found in Appendix 8 of this thesis.

Transcription and analysis of semi-structured interviews

I used the same process to transcribe and analyse the digitally recorded interview with my adult family members as the process I used to transcribe and analyse the interview with my grandchildren. As discussed earlier in this Chapter, this involved transcribing the interviews, reading and re-reading my subjects' responses and noting points of interest. Again, even from such a small amount of data some useful codes began to occur, such as boys were less willing to write than girls but children were more motivated to write when they were using computers for writing. Although unexpected, with such a small amount of data, there was some convergence between my two data sets, such as children were more motivated to write when they were using computers for writing.

As in the focus group interviews, this trial of the semi-structured interviews highlighted issues with regard to the time taken to transcribe the interviews, and the importance of reading and re-reading the subjects responses when analysing the data, before drawing conclusions. Listening to the questions and responses also alerted me to the need to ensure the interview flowed like a conversation, while at the same time focusing on the issues I was interested in. Although I only interviewed two subjects, they were practising primary teachers, understood the context of teaching, and were helpful in identifying some potential issues, which I was able to bear in mind in the process of conducting the interviews in the schools.

Summary and conclusion to the pilot

This pilot study has enabled me to assess my research instruments, conduct a trial run of my data collection methods and consider how to analyse the data I collected. As such, this has been a worthwhile introduction to my engagement with the research study and the subjects of the research. I was aware that there might have been bias in using family members, but as it turned out they were all harsh critics. In particular both my grandchildren, who were dyslexic and had problems with writing, were very helpful subjects, being more critical than if they had been confident writers. Additionally, my two family members, as practising primary teachers, were also challenging critics in their assessment of the process of the interview.

Finally, the research instrument, developed by the RBA study research team, was extremely helpful, as they were designed by a more experienced group of researchers than myself, which meant that I was able to avoid a more time consuming full pilot study. This also meant that the first phase of my three-year study provided a comparable data set with the second and third phases, which would not have been possible if the first phase had been a full pilot.

I now move on to provide more details about the schools I selected for my research study and why I selected them.

Research schools

I selected three schools for this study and I give here the context for each school and my rationale for selection. Background information relating to my relationship with the schools is given in the Introduction Chapter to this thesis.

Rationale for selection of the three schools

The three schools selected for this study were situated in a large urban area in inner London with high levels of deprivation. My selection was partly based on my existing knowledge of the schools (which is discussed more fully later in this section),

but, in order to ensure I had selected a representative sample of schools, I used the data from the school report published in an on-line database called RAISEonline (RAISEonline, 2007). RAISEonline contains a wide range of analytical information and tools to support the analysis of school performance. For example, reports which provided analysis of attainment in the National Curriculum Key Stage tests and examinations. RAISEonline also contained contextual information about schools, such as the characteristics of pupils, for example, gender, English as an additional language (EAL), free school meals (FSM), Special Educational Needs (SEN), and deprivation. Schools were selected based on different contexts (level of deprivation in the local area), size (number of children in the school), with different contextual value added progress measures in English, different numbers of children whose first language was not English and different average point scores in English at Key Stage 2 (KS2) for boys and girls.

The data extracted from RAISEonline 2007 included:

- school size (School size is based on pupil numbers)
- school deprivation indicator. (The school deprivation indicator is based on Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI). The IDACI, one of the indices of multiple deprivation produced by the former Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in 2004. It shows the percentage of children in each area that live in families that are income deprived (i.e. in receipt of Income Support, Income based Jobseeker's Allowance, Working Families' Tax Credit or Disabled Person's Tax Credit below a given threshold. By assigning a pupil a score based on their postcode, a school average is derived.)
- contextual value added (CVA) scores in English at KS2. (CVA takes into account a range of prior attainment factors as well as contextual factors such as English as an additional language (EAL), Free school meals (FSM) and Special Educational Needs (SEN). This means, for example, that expected results of pupils with special needs are different from those of pupils with the same prior attainment but who do not have special needs.)

- average point scores (APS) in English at KS2, for boys and girls and the number of pupils whose first language was not English. (Children are required to take tests in English, Maths and Science at the end of each key stage in order to test their progress against the National Curriculum. The National Curriculum levels are converted into point scores, using the formula: Level multiplied by 6 add 3. For example, Level 3 = 21 points, Level 4 = 27 points and Level 5 = 33 points.)

The data extracted from RAISEonline 2007, for each school, along with the National data for comparative purposes, is detailed in the table below. A summary description of the schools is given at the end of this section.

Table 3.2	School data from RAISEonline 2007			
	National averages	Brooktown	Estateside	Somerview
Number of pupils on roll	237	450	209	240
Deprivation indicator	0.2	0.5	0.3	0.2
CVA attainment score for English at KS2	100* (range 104.3 – 96.4)	100.6	99.7	99.9
English APS at KS2	boys (27.0), girls (28.3)	boys (24.1), girls (27.0)	boys (26.3), girls (27.0)	boys (27.7), girls (28.5)
% of pupils whose first language was not English	13.4%	58.9%	33.5%	19%

* CVA scores above 100 show pupils made more progress than similar pupils nationally. Scores below 100 indicate less progress.

The data in the table above shows that each of these schools was of a different size, with different deprivation indicators, different attainment scores in English at KS2 and different numbers of pupils whose first language was not English. At Estateside and Brooktown the children achieved below the National average for English at KS2 and Somerview children achieved above. However, in all three schools boys achieved less well than girls in English at KS2. The three schools were selected from three different quadrants of the local authority, North, South and East, with the North and East

serving a higher proportion of socially disadvantaged families. As such these three schools were representative of the 68 primary schools in the local authority in this large urban area with high levels of deprivation.

Table 3.3	Summary of context of the three schools		
	Brooktown	Estateside	Somerview
School is located in area of:	High socio-economic disadvantage	Socio-economic disadvantage	Socio-economic advantage
Size of school:	Larger than average	Smaller than average	Average
Ofsted judgement of the school:	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Outstanding

Further details of the contexts of each of the three schools is given in the Findings Chapters, 4, 5 and 6, each of which Chapters focuses on one school.

I now move on to a discussion of the ethical issues I reflected on of when conducting my research with these schools.

Ethical issues

There were a number of ethical issues I considered in relation to my contact with the schools and the children, such as parental consent, children's confidentiality, teachers' time and the care and attention needed when researching with children. These are issues I discuss here. The issue of my background and positioning in relation to this study is discussed in the Research Introduction, Chapter 1 of this thesis.

Communication with the schools

Once the Headteachers had given their verbal agreement for the school to be part of the research project, a letter was sent by me to formally invite them (see Appendix 9). I then created an information sheet for participants for the lead teachers and the class teachers involved in the research project (see Appendix 10). This was particularly

useful in Brooktown, where I was not able to meet all the Y4 class teachers. I wrote a letter to parents seeking permission for their child to be involved in a focus group interview (see Appendix 11). The letters seeking parental consent were sent by the class teacher to the parents of the selected boys. In Brooktown the parents of four boys gave their consent, in Estateside, the parents of six boys gave their consent and in Somerview the parents of five boys gave their consent. The Headteachers and teachers in each of the three schools were keen to find out more about children's attitudes to writing and what helped/hindered them. However, this raised the issue of confidentiality and staff being able to identify which children had made particular comments. In order to protect children's confidentiality, only key issues and not individual comments, were reported back to the school. A short report, summarising the generalised findings, was sent to the Headteachers at the end of the three phases of the study.

The project was approved by the King's College London, Ethics Committee in February 2008 (Reference (REP(EM)/07/08-70)

Access in the schools

Initial access in these schools was made easier for me as a result of my good working relationship, particularly with the Headteachers. However, Ball (1990) suggested that permission from the Headteacher does not always guarantee co-operation of teachers or children and that the researcher can be identified with the formal authorities in the system and this may inhibit access. He suggested researchers were confronted with "multiple negotiations of microaccess" (Ball, 1990:159). As I did not have a working relationship with the class teachers I would be interviewing in the school, I needed to establish one. I did this initially through e-mail and telephone communication and then developed this further during my visits to the school to conduct the interviews. I also recognised that these teachers had extremely busy working lives and they were giving up their time to communicate and meet with me, for no other reason than they had been asked to do this by their Headteacher. As such, I was extremely grateful to them and let them know this whenever I had any communication with them. However, there were some minor issues regarding access and these are discussed in the data collection sections in the early part of Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

Confidentiality/anonymity

In order to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the schools and children I have used pseudonyms throughout this thesis. When reporting back to schools I have not disclosed any data from the focus group interviews with the boys that was critical of the school or data that could have revealed the identity of individual boys. During interviews with the children and staff I have reassured them that what they tell me is confidential and that the real name of the school and their names will not be used in my thesis. Further, where I have quoted from certain documents in my thesis, such as school policies or school Ofsted reports, I have amended the wording to protect the anonymity of the school.

Researching with children

Alderson & Morrow (2004) suggested that children were among the groups that had been most excluded from research, and argued for greater involvement of children at all stages of a research study, through planning, implementation and informing the writing up of research findings and drawing of conclusions. Rudduck & Flutter (2000) argued that children's perspectives, their experiences and views, needed to be sought when school improvement was being planned, in order to gain insights into the regimes and relationships in school and how these shaped children's sense of status as individual learners and their commitment to learning in school. In consideration of these issues I conducted focus group interviews with the boys as the central part of my data collection alongside a semi-structured interviews with their teachers.

However, Alderson & Morrow (2004) also outlined the care and attention needed by researchers planning a participatory research project involving children in order to: enable them to be heard without exploiting them; protect them without excluding them and pursue rigorous enquiry without distressing them. In light of these issues, when interviewing the children I listened carefully and responded sensitively to their comments and encouraged them to respond sensitively to each others comments. I also spent much time adapting the questions for the focus group interviews, to ensure the questions were appropriate (fuller details of this are given in the Pilot Study section earlier in this Chapter). Further, when interpreting what the boys said in their

interviews with me, I was reflexive and sought to suspend my own pre-conceptions in order to more closely represent the children's own views (issues of sensitivity and reflexivity are discussed more fully later in this Chapter).

Punch (2002) argued that research with children was potentially different from research with adults, mainly because of adult perceptions of children, and children's marginalised position in adult society. I took this into account when planning, conducting and analysing my focus group interviews with the boys. For example, I was very careful not to impose my own views and encouraged the boys to express their perceptions freely. However, I was aware that my being much older than the boys and being female would influence, to some extent, the way the boys responded to me. Ball (1990) argued that there were occasions when these differential relations in the field could be exploited in the quest for good data. With this in mind I attempted at all times during the interviews with the boys to adopt the role of an empathetic listener. Further, I also considered, when analysing my data, the influence of the boys themselves on the social interactions within the group and this is discussed later in this Chapter.

I now move on to a fuller discussion of the methods I used to gather the data for this research study.

Data gathering methods

I give below details of my two data gathering instruments: focus group interviews and semi-structured interviews.

Focus group interviews with boys

The purpose of the focus group interviews for my study was to provide me with a first hand account of the boys' views about writing. A number of researchers have argued that the strengths of focus group interviews, compared to individual interviews, were that they enabled individuals to respond in their own words and allowed individuals to react to and build upon the responses of group members (Stewart & Shamdasini, 1990;

Morgan, 1997). Further, Barbour (2007) argued that focus group interviews were a useful way of engaging with respondents who were otherwise reluctant to elaborate on their perspectives and experiences, such as young children (Barbour, 2007). As such, focus group interviews were my chosen method to elicit the views of the boys in my study.

However, it has also been argued that the strength of focus group interviews to support group interaction also created a corresponding weakness in that the group itself influenced the data produced (Stewart & Shamdasini, 1990; Morgan, 1997; Barbour, 2007). Further, Stewart & Shamdasini highlighted the additional challenge to researchers in their role as moderator of focus group interviews, when they said: "He or she [the moderator] has the unenviable task of balancing the requirements of sensitivity and empathy on the one hand and objectivity and detachment on the other." (Stewart & Shamdasini, 1990:69). In view of these issues I listened carefully to the boys' responses, ensured all the boys had the opportunity to contribute, and encouraged them to express their own views during the interviews. Further, I was both sensitive and reflexive when interviewing the boys, and when analysing the data produced, the latter of which is discussed more fully later in this Chapter.

The design of each focus group was based on a 'funnel' approach (Morgan, 1997). This approach took the form of a loose structure at the start of the interview, which emphasised free discussion, and was then followed by a more structured discussion of specific questions, focusing on boys' perceptions of themselves as learners and writers in school. Morgan also suggested, that this compromise in approach to a focus group interview was needed so that a researcher could hear the participants' own perspectives, in the early part of each discussion, as well as their responses to more specific questions later on. Taking these issues into account, I invited children, at the beginning of the interview, to say something about what they liked to do for fun. This was followed by more specific questions relating to their views about learning to write in the primary classroom. This also gave me an opportunity to find out more about the children before asking them specific questions and provided an opportunity for the children to settle down and relax before the more structured part of the interview began. However, during phases 2 and 3, as the boys already knew me and were familiar with the format and content of the interview, I was able to adjust the timing, in

order to spend less time on the starter question and longer on the questions relating to writing. This also enabled me to probe in more depth some of the issues emerging from the first stage of my research, without the need to increase the time needed for the interview, such as probing in more detail for the reasons why the boys liked being able to choose their own topics. In order to bring the interview to a close, I invited the children to reflect on the topics they had discussed and to share the topic that had been most important for them. This gave the children an opportunity to relax at the end of the interview and enabled me to close the interview sensitively.

Selection of the groups of boys

The boys were selected for the focus group interviews by a member of staff chosen by the Headteacher. In Brooktown, the Literacy Co-ordinator, in conjunction with the Y4 teachers, selected the boys for the focus group; in Estateside, the Headteacher, in conjunction with the Y4 teacher selected the boys for the focus group; and in Somerview the Y4 teacher selected the boys for the focus group.

Morgan (1997) argued that it was important that the composition of a focus group contained participants in each group that had something to say about the topic and felt comfortable saying it to each other, and that there were no wide gaps in social background nor homogeneity in attitudes within the group. In view of these issues, I asked the teachers from the three different schools to randomly select between four to six boys from three ability groups in writing (above average, average and below average). As there was no measure of children's writing available, which would give a uniform picture of their writing across the schools, I asked the teachers to categorise children on the basis of all the evidence they had accumulated, over the 10 months of their daily interaction with them. I also believed that reliance on teachers' professional judgement of children, over an extended period of time, was preferable to the use of standardised measures. However, there may have been a variance in teacher judgements of children's ability, which could have introduced a source of error, the size of which would be difficult to estimate. Nevertheless, this issue has been taken into account when drawing conclusions, based on such a small sample size. I also asked the teachers not to select any child who they thought might be uncomfortable

being interviewed by an adult they did not previously know, or who would be unhappy talking in a group about writing.

Procedural issues

Prior to the focus groups taking place in phase 1 of this study, the teachers in Estateside and Somerview requested that I meet with their Y4 class and explain to the children about the research study, and tell them that I would be returning to interview them again when they were in Y5 and Y6. Although I offered to meet the Y4 classes in Brooktown, the Literacy Co-ordinator said this was not necessary and so, to assist her I gave her an information sheet for participants' to pass to the teachers, to use when they introduced the study to their class (see Appendix 10 of this thesis).

Barbour (2007) highlighted the importance of ensuring the room was appropriate for the focus group to take place and one where the participants would feel comfortable, and that moderators needed to explain the purpose of the group and give reassurances regarding anonymity and confidentiality. In consideration of these issues, I conducted the interviews, with the 4 – 6 boys selected, in a quiet room in each school. Each began with a short introduction. This consisted of an introduction to myself, an explanation of the purpose of the research, and a check to ensure children were happy to continue to take part. The children were reassured that their personal names or the details of what they had said would not be used in any reports to the school, in order to protect their confidentiality. Children were given name labels, and I also had a name label, to facilitate identification of individuals during the interview. Children were introduced to the computer and microphone, which were to be used to tape record the group discussion. The children were asked to say something into the microphone, in their normal voice, so that the equipment could be tested to ensure each child could be heard and so that they could hear what their voice sounded like. I explained to the children the purpose of recording the session and that the recordings would only be heard by myself for transcription and then deleted.

The equipment I used to record the interviews was trialled prior to the beginning of the interviews with the children in the schools, as part of a pilot for this study (fuller details are given earlier in this Chapter). This trial was helpful in organising the

seating in the focus groups and ensured that all the comments the boys made were clearly audible during transcription. There were a few instances where boys mumbled when they made their contribution, which meant that odd words were not able to be heard and were not transcribed. However, this did not significantly affect my understanding of the points the boys were trying to make.

Rosier (1997) argued that there were benefits from longitudinal studies, in that repeated measures could be taken from the same respondents, but that it was not always possible for researchers to have access to the same group of students. Where this was the case, Rosier suggested that where possible, the missing students could be replaced with students of similar characteristics (Rosier, 1997). During my own research for this thesis there were issues relating to missing students and this issue has been discussed fully, as a procedural issue, where relevant, in the three Chapters where I discuss the findings from each of the three schools in my study. Further, Barbour (2007) argued: "If we really want to unpick the process of individual attitude formation, then perhaps we would be better advised to run a series of focus group discussions in order to monitor shifts over time". (Barbour, 2007:31). During the three years of my study, the process of re-visiting and re-interviewing the boys, meant the boys became more comfortable to talk in subsequent interviews as they became more familiar with the process of articulating their views. As a result I was able to note the changes in their responses to the same questions over time. Most notably, shifts in the boys' attitudes towards writing, as a result of changes in the conditions in which they were learning in their classrooms over time, contributed significantly to the main findings for this study (a discussion of these is given in the Main Findings Chapter 7 of this thesis).

Transcription & analysis of focus group interviews with boys

The interviews were transcribed using the grid developed as part of the pilot study. However, there were a small number of occasions when the boys spoke half-finished thoughts, odd pieces of words or odd phrases and this created some gaps in the transcript. Stewart & Shamdasini (1990) argued that although some editing by moderators increased the readability of a transcript, it was important that the editing process maintained the character of the respondents' comments. In light of this, where

the boys appeared confused and parts of their responses were unclear, I made some small amendments to the text to record the sense of what they were saying.

The first stage of the analysis of the transcripts involved reading and re-reading the boys' responses, identifying interesting points and recording them in the 'comments' column in the transcription grid. Further reading of the transcripts enabled me to identify initial codes and attach labels to them. The second stage of the analysis involved identifying categories for the most frequent codes to help me both make sense of what the boys had said and to explain larger sections of the data. (An example of this process is given in Appendix 1 of this thesis).

From the first and second stages of the analysis, it was clear that there were a number of common issues raised by the boys in the different schools. For example, most of the boys mentioned, at some point during the interview, they had difficulties with the technical aspects of writing, in particular handwriting. Initially a simple count was recorded of the number of occurrences a particular point was made by the boys in all three schools. However, this did not take account of the extent to which this was an issue for one or two boys or for the whole group. In order to address this I recorded the frequency certain points were made by individual boys. Barbour (2007) argued that focus groups can tend to emphasise consensus and it was important to focus on individual voices to determine the extent to which a perspective was an individual or collective one.

Others have argued that group members can have an influence on the social interaction in the group (Goffman, 1959 & 1981). Goffman (1959) argued that individuals will present themselves in a specific way before others in order to create a particular impression and that this can influence the definition of the situation and the way that other participants in a group behave, but that all have a role to play. He suggests:

“Together the participants contribute to a single over-all definition of the situation which involves not so much a real agreement as to what exists but rather a real agreement as to whose claims concerning what issues will be temporarily honoured.” (Goffman, 1959:9)

As such, Goffman suggests that some members may not reveal their feelings about a topic in order to maintain at least a temporary consensus and that in exchange for this courtesy, some participants may remain silent or non-committal on matters that are important to others but not immediately important to them. In light of this, when analysing the responses of the boys I interviewed, before making a judgement about the extent to which they agreed with the rest of the group on a particular issue in response to a particular question, I re-read their other responses in other parts of the interview to check whether there was any evidence of consensus or conflict in the other comments they made. One example of this was the silence of some of the boys in Somerview during their responses about the length of writing tasks, where one boy said he liked longer writing and another said he did not. I re-checked the 'silent' boys comments during the interview and found no other comments that related to any difficulties they had with longer pieces of writing or sustaining their writing, rather, noted that their stated preferences were for the kinds of writing that would have required them to write at length, such as critical reports. As a result, I interpreted their 'silence' to mean that sustaining longer pieces of writing was not an issue for them. However, the boys did not always agree with each other, such as Richard's disagreement with his classmates in regard to girls' and boys' aptitudes in different school subjects, and although his classmates did not change their stance, Tim's conciliatory contribution enabled the boys to find something they could agree on. Heritage & Raymond (2005) explored the different practices people used to manage controversial actions, such as agreement and disagreement and found that people often managed controversial actions to achieve social solidarity, something Tim attempted to achieve with his classmates in Somerview. A fuller analysis of this interaction between the Somerview boys is given in Appendix 12 of this thesis.

Goffman also argued that when analysing interactional discourse data it was important to look at "the whole situation, the whole surround, must always be considered" (Goffman, 1981:144), taking into account gaze, gesture, posture, spatial positioning, orientation to objects, etc. as well as speech. In light of this I took account of the boys' non-verbal responses to the comments of other boys, as well as their verbal responses. An example of this was when Ian in Estateside said he liked to write a diary at home, the other boys responded with giggles and snorts. As a result Ian adjusted what he had said to include his preference for writing e-mails, something the other boys had said

they liked to write at home. I interpreted the boys' giggles and snorts to mean that the consensus in the group was that the writing of diaries at home was not an acceptable practice for boys and that their giggles were designed to let Ian know this.

Others have argued that analysis of interactions needed to include scrutiny of sequences in conversations, to illustrate how individual actions are linked to each other, how individuals take turns in their interactions, and the underlying social processes their emerging stories reveal (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990; Heritage, 1994). In light of this, when analysing the boys' interviews, I looked in detail at their prolonged interactions in order to identify which boy initiated the narrative and how the other boys contributed in order to identify how the story had emerged and what it was. An example of this was how Cal in Estateside initiated a prolonged interaction on the girls 'laddish' behaviour. A more detailed analysis of this can be found in Appendix 12.

However, Strauss (1987) points out that it is important to consider the social interactions within the group, but not to the extent that "it overwhelms or prevents attention to the larger structural conditions" (Strauss, 1987:78), and that both need to enter the analysis of data. In light of this I considered the influences of the boys themselves on the social interaction within the group in addition to the wider influences, such as their teacher in the classroom, their families at home and Government literacy policy. Nevertheless, I frequently returned to the data to re-check and double check for influences within the group before drawing conclusions about the consensus amongst the boys about particular issues.

The third stage of my analysis of the focus group interviews with the boys involved comparing and contrasting the comments made by the boys, across the three different schools, in order to identify the extent to which an issue was isolated to one school, or was a common issue across the schools. At this stage I introduced colour coding, so that it was possible to identify the number of times boys in each school made a particular comment. To facilitate cross-referencing of the data, from the three schools, I created a mind map, such as the mind map I created of the category 'attitude to literacy and writing'. From this mapping I was able to identify linkages between the comments related to that category and also to identify sub-categories. As Clarke

(2005) has argued, mapping makes the key elements of a situation more visible and shows their interrelatedness. This process is illustrated in Appendix 3 of this thesis.

The outcomes of this third stage of my analysis fed into the identification of a number of categories, which were:

- Attitude to literacy and writing
- Difficulties with writing
- Differential performance
- Fairness
- Parental support
- Barriers to learning
- Motivation

Although, this third stage of the analysis was useful in analysing the data sets from the focus groups across the three schools in each phase it did not facilitate a comparative analysis of the two data sets across the three phases of this study. In order to determine the possible relationships between the categories (Charmaz, 2006), I identify the main themes that connected the categories and make some theoretical propositions, and this formed the fourth stage of analysis that is discussed more fully later in this Chapter.

Semi-structured interviews with teachers

The purpose of the semi-structured interviews with the teachers was to find out their views of the issues under study.

Kvale (1996) suggested that teachers' and pupils' might hold different views, however, he argued that one of the strengths of the interview conversation was that it could capture a multitude of subjects' views of a complex human world. Kvale defined a semi-structured interview as:

It has a sequence of themes to be covered, as well as suggested questions. Yet at the same time there is an openness to changes of sequence and forms of question in order to follow up the answers given and the stories told by the subjects (Kvale, 1996:124).

I selected three themes to give structure to my interview with the teachers. These themes were: 'context for writing', 'attitudes to writing' and 'pedagogical solutions'. Firstly I wanted to explore the climate for writing in the teachers' classrooms, whether the boys enjoyed writing and what difficulties they had. Secondly, I wanted to know more about whether the teachers were aware of any gender differences in children's attitudes to writing. Thirdly I was interested to know more about the strategies the teachers had found most effective to motivate boys who were reluctant to write. These themes provided me with a structure to help to keep me on track during the interviews, but also provided opportunities for the teachers to talk about the things that interested them. As an additional aid I used an aide-memoire to structure the interview, which contained questions and prompts, but was open-ended enough to enable me to allow the teachers to talk at length about aspects they were concerned about, and for me to follow up on areas I was interested to find out more about. This made the interview more like a conversation with a purpose (Kvale, 1996). The aide-memoire I used during the interviews with the teachers was trialled as part of the pilot for this study. This trial was helpful in the re-ordering of the questions and the inclusion of prompts to improve to ensure the interview flowed like a conversation (the aide-memoire I used is given in Appendix 8 of this thesis).

Procedural issues

At the beginning of each interview I explained the purpose of the interview, the use of the digital recorder and checked that the teachers were still happy to take part and for the interview to be recorded. Some researchers have argued that when participants agree to be interviewed they have the right to expect that the data will be handled with respect and discretion (King, 2004; King & Horrocks, 2010). In light of this, I reassured the teachers that their comments during the interview would be confidential, that the tape recording would be deleted when it had been transcribed, and that their names would not be used in any written work related to the study. I also asked them if

they had any questions before I started the interview. In order to put the teachers at ease and to help them to start thinking about the topic of the interview, I asked them about their own experience of learning to write at school. I was also conscious that the interview would need to be drawn to a conclusion and that there may be some tension or anxiety, because the teachers had been open about their personal and emotional experiences of teaching. Kvale (1996) highlighted the importance of bringing an interview to a close sensitively, as the interviewee may be feeling tense after talking about some of the issues that had been raised during the interview. In order to round off the interview I asked the teachers to say something about what advice they would give to a new teacher about teaching writing. This helped to distance them from talking about their own personal experiences in their classrooms and also served to highlight the main points from the interview. In order to give the teachers the opportunity to deal with any issues that they were thinking or worrying about during the interview, I asked them if they had any further questions. Finally I thanked them for taking part in the interview and re-assured them again about confidentiality.

Transcription & analysis of semi-structured interviews with teachers

It has been argued that the highly personal nature of qualitative interviewing meant that researchers needed to be critically reflexive, to take account of the impact of their presence on the participant during the interview and the impact of the theoretical lens through which they view the participants' responses (King, 2004; King & Horrocks, 2010). Taking into account these issues I adopted a reflexive stance when analysing the data from the interview, such as checking I had not asked any leading questions and ensuring I suspended any preconceptions when analysing their responses and drawing conclusions.

The interviews were transcribed in a similar way to the interviews with the boys using the same grid. The comments column in the grid was useful in helping me to identify interesting points emerging from the discussion and to begin to code the data as part of the first two stages of my analysis. Shortly after each interview with the teachers I recorded in my research journal what I had learned from each interview, and made notes on interpersonal interactions. An example of this was my reflections on how the

teachers had responded to particular questions, and why they may have responded in that way. These notes were helpful when I later analysed the transcripts.

My analysis of the semi-structured interviews with the teachers was conducted in the same way as the analysis of the focus group interviews with the boys. Firstly, I read and re-read the transcripts of the interviews to identify the issues raised by the teachers in the different schools, and then to begin to code the data on the transcription grid. One common issue raised by the teachers was that they thought boys had more difficulties with the technical aspects than girls, in particular handwriting and this concurred with the findings from the focus group interviews with the boys. The second stage involved more focussed coding and re-grouping of the data into categories. The third stage involved the use of a mind map to collate, group, re-group and cross-reference the data. At each stage of my analysis I have compared and critically reflected on the categories. However, as no new categories emerged from this analysis, and as the majority of the responses made by the teachers concurred with the responses made by the boys, to aid comparisons across the data sets I re-grouped the data from the teacher interviews into three of the categories that emerged from my interviews with the boys. These categories were: difficulties with writing; differential performance and motivation. This re-grouping of the data facilitated the fourth stage of my analysis and it is to a discussion of this that I now turn.

Comparative analysis of data sets from focus group interviews with the boys and semi-structured interviews with their teachers in Somerview, Estateside and Brooktown, at the end of phase 3.

The fourth stage of my analysis involved a comparative analysis of the data from my two data sources (interviews with the boys and interviews with their teachers), collected from each of the three different schools, across the three phases of my study. This comparative analysis enabled me to highlight the variation and difference of the contexts (Clarke, 2005; Charmaz, 2006) and gain some deeper insights into the factors that affected boy's attitude to writing. For example, there was convergence and conflict between the data sources in relation to the way the boys perceived they were treated by their teachers and their beliefs about the differential performance of girls

and boys that affected the way the boys perceived themselves and writers and the way they responded to writing in their classrooms (see example of comparative analysis in Appendix 5 of this thesis).

This comparative process also facilitated the identification of four main themes which connected the categories and these were:

- Gender and socio-economic beliefs
- Self-belief
- Expectations
- Pedagogy

Charmaz (2006) suggested that this stage of the analysis enables a researcher to begin to conceptualise the relationships between the categories and to move an analytic story towards the development of some theoretical propositions. From this fourth and final stage of my analysis I developed five theoretically significant propositions. These propositions, along with fuller details of data sources and evidence, can be found in Appendix 6 of this thesis.

Establishing the reliability, validity & credibility of my research study

It has been argued that there are different notions of reliability and validity in quantitative and qualitative research and that a combination of these two will establish the creditability of the research study (Creswell & Miller, 2000, Golafshani, 2003). In quantitative studies, researchers were thought to be more concerned with the validity of the construction of their research instruments, and experimental designs and with the repeatability and replicability of their research. This contrasted with qualitative studies, where researchers were thought to be more concerned to establish how accurately their account represented participants' realities of the social phenomena being studied (Golafshani, 2003). However, some grounded theorists (Clarke, 2005; Charmaz, 2006) have been critical of what they understood to be the objective positivist research intentions of the original formulation of grounded theory as

proposed by Glaser & Strauss (1967) and called for a broader interpretation of grounded theory arguing for a less objectivist and more constructivist approach that acknowledges the role of the researcher and the interpretative and subjective nature of findings (Clarke, 2005; Charmaz, 2006). In consideration of these issues I adopted a number of procedures to establish the credibility of my research study, most important of which was reflexivity.

Procedures to establish credibility

Creswell & Miller (2000) proposed nine different procedures that researchers might use to establish the credibility of their research study. These were: triangulation, disconfirming evidence, researcher reflexivity, member checking, prolonged engagement in the field, collaboration, the audit trail, thick, rich description and peer debriefing. Creswell & Miller recommended that researchers select several procedures, which best suited their own research study. I selected four of these procedures: triangulation, prolonged engagement in the field, member checking and researcher reflexivity/sensitivity and discuss below how I adapted and used these for my own research study.

Triangulation

The first procedure I selected was triangulation, defined as: "... a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study" (Creswell & Miller, 2000:126). I triangulated the data for my research study by collecting data from three different sources using two different methods. This involved: collecting data from three different primary schools of different size and in very different socio-economic locations, through focus group interviews with small groups of boys; semi-structured, one-to-one interviews with the boys' teachers. Once I had collected the data, as described earlier in this section, I compared and contrasted the data to identify points of convergence and conflict. These multiple comparative analyses of data sets gave me a deeper insight into the phenomenon I was studying.

Prolonged engagement in the field

The second procedure I selected was prolonged engagement in the field, which helped me to “check out the data and hunches and compare interview data with observational data” (Creswell & Miller, 2000:128). I did not include observational data in my research design but I did design it as a three-year longitudinal research study, where I re-visited and re-interviewed my participants three times over three years. This enabled me to follow up on issues emerging in the first phase in more depth in subsequent phases, such as the boys': negative attitude towards writing; particular difficulties with the technical aspects of writing and sense of inequity in the classroom. The longitudinal study also enabled me to gain an insight into the changes in schools over the three years, and the impact this had on the boys' attitudes, such changes in their classroom climates as a result of being taught by different teachers.

Member checking

The procedure I initially considered and did not fully select to establish the validity of my research study was member checking, which involved: “Taking data and interpretations back to the participants in the study so that they can confirm the credibility of the information and narrative account” (Creswell & Miller, 2000:127). I considered sharing the categories emerging from the first stage of the research with the boys (the members) during the second focus group interview. Alderson & Morrow suggested that sharing emerging categories with children at subsequent interviews could enable a researcher to establish whether the categories were an accurate representation of the children's views, and also serve to identify whether any further questions needed to be asked (Alderson & Morrow, 2004). However, I decided against this for two reasons: firstly some of the categories were critical of the school and secondly I did not want to influence the boys' views at this stage of the research. With regard to the critical nature of some of the categories, I did not want the boys to feel that in reporting back their comments I was agreeing with their criticisms. I was also concerned that they may leave the interview room and report the critical categories back to other children or to their teachers, which out of context, could be misunderstood. My other main concern was that reporting the categories back to the

children and discussing them with them could have unduly influenced the way they answered the questions in a subsequent phase of the research.

Sensitivity & reflexivity

Lincoln & Guba argued that the values of the researcher influenced: choice of research question; methods selected; interpretation of results and the context in which the inquiry took place (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). At all stages of my research I attempted to be critically reflective, when selecting my question, choosing the most appropriate methods and when interviewing subjects and searching for meaning in my data. Glaser argued that an important feature of grounded theory method, the approach I used to analyse my research data, was theoretical sensitivity, which he described as the process of developing insight with which a researcher comes to the research situation (Glaser, 1978). Ball described this as being reflexive: "Ethnography not only implies engagement of the researcher in the world under study; it also implies a commitment to a search for meaning, a suspension of preconceptions, and an orientation to discovery" (Ball, 1990:157). Strauss & Corbin suggested that theoretical sensitivity indicated an awareness of the researcher to the subtleties of the meaning of the data they had collected, and that there were varying degrees of sensitivity depending on previous reading and experience within an area of study (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). However, some have argued that there has been a lack of reflexivity in grounded theory work and argued for more focus on the way researchers scrutinize their own interpretations, and the extent to which their own interests and positions influence the inquiry (Clarke, 2005; Charmaz, 2006). Taking these issues into account, I have provided background information in Chapter 1, Introduction to this thesis on my background and positioning in relation to this study. Further, during the data collection and analysis stages of my research study, I read widely to expand my knowledge of the issues, and used my research journal to help me to suspend any preconceptions I might have, in order to try to discover what was emerging from the data rather than seeking to confirm what I thought I already knew.

Conclusion

In this research study I wanted to explore the factors that influenced boys' attitude to writing. In order to do this I chose to interview groups of children and their teachers, to find out more about how their thoughts and feelings related to the teaching and learning of writing in school classrooms. My choice of research approach was guided by two factors, firstly I did not have a theory at the start of the research and secondly I wanted to talk first hand to the participants in their own contexts to explore their views. Although I had assumptions and general views about the reasons why boys were less positive about writing than girls, based on my experience as a classroom teacher and an advisory teacher, and from my wide reading of the literature, these were not specific, for example, whether the home, school or classroom were the strongest influences on the boys. As such, the grounded theory approach as originally conceived by Glaser & Strauss (1967) and adapted by others (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Clarke, 2005; Charmaz, 2006), where researchers insights and theoretical propositions emerge through a cycle of data collection, analysis and writing up, provided me with a helpful framework in which to conduct the research and analyse the data while acknowledging that "... research participants offer an interpretation of their world as they see it but also that the ... resulting theory is an interpretation...". (Charmaz, 2006:130).

However, the eighteen sets of data from interviews with boys and their teachers collected from the three school sites over a three-year period, constituted a substantial amount of data for this modest research study. Although it is difficult to ensure saturation in the way traditional grounded theorists claim, as fresh perspectives on the same data are always possible, I did reach the point where I was able to produce a satisfactorily convincing interpretation, having engaged exhaustively with the data. Although at the beginning of the fieldwork I found it difficult to distance myself from my previous roles as teacher when interviewing the boys and local authority adviser when interviewing the teachers; through critical reflection on my role as a researcher when listening to and transcribing my tape recordings, particularly in the first phase of this study, I was able to improve on my role as an interviewer, and focus more on listening and probing the views of others and avoid a tendency to drift towards giving advice and guidance. When analysing my data I have, at all times, challenged my own interpretation in order to try to reduce the influence of my own values and beliefs.

Though I have found the process of being continually critically reflexive a challenge, I have as a result, learned much on a personal level from this experience. Lincoln & Guba (1985) aptly describe this process as: "It is a conscious experiencing of the self as both inquirer & respondent, as teacher and learner, as the one coming to know the self within the processes of research itself." (Guba, et al, 1985:210).

My research approach, data collection techniques and attempting at all times to take a reflexive stance enabled me to gather a rich, rounded, multi-dimensional picture of the influences on boys' attitudes towards and performance in writing in school classrooms. The grounded theory constant comparative method provided me with rigour and direction, and the flexible and reflexive approach I took to my research enabled me to be confident in the theoretical propositions I outlined as a result.

I now move on to an analysis and discussion of the first of the three schools in my study, Somerview School.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS: SOMERVIEW

Introduction

In this Chapter I provide an analysis of the data from Somerview School, collected through focus group interviews with a small group of five boys and semi-structured interviews with their three teachers. The data were collected at the end of the summer term, between 2008 and 2010, when the children were in Y4, Y5 and Y6. Although the number of boys and teachers I interviewed was small, my findings from Somerview have shown that although the boys' feelings about writing were influenced by their families at home and the conditions for learning in their school, the most significant influence on the boys' attitude to writing was their individual classroom teacher and the climate for learning they created in their classroom. Most importantly, I have raised the issues of teachers' ability to see children as individuals and their responsiveness to identifying and addressing the issues children face in their writing, and the impact of this, through their daily classroom practice, on the boys' attitude to writing.

Context of the school

Background details of the school (number of pupils on roll, deprivation indicator, attainment scores for English at KS2, compared to national averages, and percentage of pupils whose first language was not English) are given in the Methodology Chapter of this thesis in the context of the rationale for my selection of the school. Here I provide a summary of the school context, details of the management of the school and the school approach to teaching Literacy at KS2.

Somerview is a single form entry school set in a more economically advantaged area and is surrounded by affluent housing. In 2007, the children, both boys and girls achieved results above the National average in their English SATs. The proportion of

pupils who speak a first language other than English is 19%, slightly higher than the National average of 13.4%. In November 2006 Ofsted inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the school to be Grade 1 (outstanding). Somerview was federated with another school in 2007. The highly successful Headteacher from Somerview is based most of the time in the federated school and returns to Somerview once a week. The Deputy Headteacher in Somerview was appointed as Associate Headteacher for the three-year period of the federation. The Associate Headteacher was previously an Advanced Skills teacher, an experienced ICT and Literacy Co-ordinator and worked as a part time ICT advisory teacher in the local authority. The Associate Headteacher continued as the Literacy Leader for the school, in addition to her role as Associate Headteacher. The highly experienced teaching staff at Somerview, are shared for the period of the federation with the other school.

Approach to teaching literacy

The teachers in Somerview School use the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) framework to plan their teaching (a brief outline of the NLS is given in the Literature Review, Chapter 2 of this thesis), but draw the context for writing from other curriculum subjects, such as religious education, history and geography and the arts, in order to provide a rich and wide range of experiences through which to develop literacy skills. A planned literacy session takes place daily, which include a 30 minute reading session, guided reading for groups of children with the teacher and the teaching assistant and other reading activities for other children, including quizzes, non-fiction research in the library or reading play scripts. Within the planned literacy session, time is increased where appropriate to allow for extended writing. As a precursor to all writing activities in classrooms children are encouraged to talk to other children to support their oral rehearsal and the sharing of ideas. To teach spelling the school uses an independent investigative approach with a progression towards conventional spelling and exploration of vocabulary extension. Children are encouraged to practise handwriting at least once a week, more often for individuals who require extra support. Children are encouraged to make considered, thoughtful responses in their Reading Response Diaries and these diaries are used to provide information for the families on the aspect of reading their child is working on and encourages the families to respond. The use of ICT is seen by the school as vital and is

used for teaching purposes, such as the use of interactive whiteboards in each classroom, and to support the children's literacy development, by use of word processing, desk top publishing, Internet for research, video-conferencing and e-mail. The English team leader, responsible for the literacy curriculum, is also supported by a resources manager who organises the literacy resources and updates the e-learning website with documents for staff planning in literacy. The school has a library with fiction and non-fiction material and children are encouraged to select books to take home. There is also a Literacy Resources room with fiction and non-fiction texts and CDs, to support staff with their teaching of Literacy. I would describe this approach to teaching literacy as holistic.

Focus group interviews with the Somerview boys and semi-structured interviews with their teachers

The purpose of the focus group interviews was to gain a deeper insight into how the boys felt about writing in their school classrooms. Although the Y4 teacher initially selected six boys to take part in the interviews, one boy was absent on the day of the first interview and did not want to take part in subsequent interviews. As a result, the interviews consisted of the same five boys in each of the three phases of this study. The boys knew each other well, and their interaction with me and with each other provided a rich source of data with which to better understand their individual perspectives, as literacy learners in their school. In order to protect the boys' anonymity I have given them pseudonyms and these are: Joel, Tim, Owen, Lee and Richard. A fuller discussion of the methodology of the focus group interviews is given in the Methodology Chapter 3 of this thesis.

The purpose of the semi-structured interviews with the teachers was to access the teachers' perspective on the teaching and learning of writing in their school classroom. Although I recorded the interviews in phases 2 and 3 I did not do this in phase 1. The reason for this was the Y4 teacher arrived late for the interview and was concerned about aspects of the research, such as the audience for the study and anonymity. Although this had been communicated to her in advance of the interview in the Information Sheet for Participants (see Appendix 10), the Y4 teacher wanted to discuss

this with me. As a result this further reduced the time available and I did not feel it was feasible to record our conversation, however, I did make copious notes both during and after the interview. In order to protect the three teachers' anonymity I have referred to them by their Year group, Y4, Y5 or Y6 teacher and the phase in which they taught the children. These three teachers were also different individuals. A fuller discussion of the semi-structured interviews with the teachers is given in the Methodology Chapter 3 of this thesis.

Summary of findings from analysis of focus group interviews with the Somerview boys and semi-structured interviews with their teachers

I have drawn throughout this Chapter on firstly, my analysis of the data from my interviews with the boys, in order to highlight points of similarity and difference in the boys' individual views and secondly, from my interviews with their teachers, to highlight points of similarity and difference in their individual views. Further, I have compared and contrasted the data from the interviews with the boys and the interviews with their teachers in order to provide an explanation for the boys' attitude to writing and, most importantly, to the changes in their attitudes over time. As discussed in the Methodology Chapter 3 of this thesis, my analysis of the data revealed seven categories and these were: attitude to literacy and writing; difficulties with writing; differential performance; fairness; parental support; barriers to learning and motivation. A summary of my findings from this analysis, matched against these categories, is shown in the table below. As can be seen, I have merged phases 2 and 3 in order to highlight the contrasts in the findings between these phases and phase 1.

Table 4.1 Summary of findings from analysis of focus group interviews with the Somerview boys and semi-structured interviews with their teachers							
Categories	Phase	Joel	Tim	Owen	Lee	Richard	Teachers
Attitude to literacy & writing	1	Negative attitude towards writing. All boys had preference for subjects with least literacy and Joel, Owen & Lee showed low self-belief in literacy.					Created a classroom climate where boys did not feel valued and where they were reluctant to write.
	2&3	More positive attitude towards writing.					Created a classroom

		All boys had a preference for subjects with least literacy, but with the exception of Owen, boys also included history or literacy in their preferences.	climate where boys' felt valued and where they wanted to write.
Difficulties with writing	1	All boys had difficulties with the technical aspects of writing & viewed writing as a technical activity.	Technical focus for teaching writing.
	2&3	Boys had a greater sense of the purpose of writing, with only Owen & Lee in phase 2 and Lee in phase 3 mentioning difficulties with the technical aspects of writing & Owen had difficulty with longer pieces of writing. In phase 3, although the boys disliked timed writing activities, with the exception of Owen, they were more able to sustain longer pieces of writing in this phase.	Genre focus for teaching writing & in phase 2 the teacher made provision for boys to have more choice over their genre for writing.
Differential performance	1	With the exception of Richard, the boys perceived that girls and boys performed differently in different school subjects in their classroom.	Lower expectations of boys than girls in writing
	2&3	With the exception of Joel in phase 3 the boys perceived boys and girls performed equally well in their classroom.	High expectations of both boys and girls
Fairness	1	Perceptions of unfairness in the way they were treated in the classroom. Joel & Richard also commented on their perception of unfairness in the provision of out-of-class literacy support.	Viewed boys as a reluctant group; teacher unaware of boys' perceptions of unfairness.
	2&3	Perceptions of equality	Viewed boys as individuals; Y5 teacher's use of pupil voice to identify and resolve issues raised by the boys

Parental support	1	With the exception of Lee & Richard who worked independently at home, the other boys received literacy support from their families. Tim & Owen were reluctant to complete their reading diaries, but the other boys indicated that they did complete them.	Reading response diary used to encourage the boys to develop the habit of reading and writing at home and to engage the families in the boys' literacy learning.
	2&3	With the exception of Owen, the other boys received literacy support from their families and were more positive about completing their reading diaries.	As above and Y5 & Y6 teachers used pupil voice and teacher collaboration respectively, to resolve issues of children's reluctance to complete their diaries.
Barriers to learning	1	Chatting and misbehaviour;	Passive approach to identifying & resolving barriers the boys faced.
	2&3	In phase 2 none of the boys mentioned chatting or misbehaviour, although in phase 3 Owen, Lee & Richard mentioned lower levels of chatting.	Proactive approach to identifying and resolving barriers the boys faced.
Motivation	1	Lacked motivation to write; Peer partners for writing helped Owen & Tim, but Richard & Joel commented on behavioural issues in their peer partner writing groups.	Narrow range of strategies to motivate boys & ineffective peer partnerships not addressed.
	2&3	More motivated and had a greater sense of autonomy as writers when they could choose their genre, knew how to write effectively with peer partners and knew how to use a computer.	Wider range of strategies including choice, computers and peer partners & provision for children to learn how to use them.

However, as these categories emerged in relation to the boys' feelings about their school, classroom, literacy and writing and in order to best explain my findings in this Chapter, I have embedded the eight categories under four broad headings as shown below:

The Somerview boys' feelings about school

School support for literacy & fairness

Home & school support for literacy

Reading Response Diaries

The Somerview boys' feelings about the classroom

Barriers to learning

Perceptions of fairness in relation to gender

Autonomy & motivation

The Somerview boys' feelings about literacy

Gendered preferences for school subjects

Beliefs about differential performance

The Somerview boys' feelings about writing

Difficulties with the technical aspects of writing

Choice & genre

Stamina & longer writing tasks

I now turn to a discussion of the boys' feelings about school.

The Somerview boys' feelings about school

Boys were asked the question "Do you like school?" Their responses are summarised below:

Table 4.2 The Somerview boys' feelings about school					
	Joel	Tim	Owen	Lee	Richard
phase 1	Ambivalent	Ambivalent	Ambivalent	Positive	Depends on teachers
phase 2	Depends on subject	Depends on subject	Depends on subject	Depends on subject	Depends on subject
phase 3	See friends	Positive & see friends	See friends	Depends on subject	Ambivalent

As can be seen from the table above, the boys' reactions to this question show that only Lee in phase 1 and Tim in phase 3 were positive about school with the other boys showing more ambivalent feelings, as illustrated in their comments below:

“Mm, in between really because we've got mixed teachers” (Richard, phase 1)

“There's not really any interesting stuff for me because I know lots of the stuff that they teach in science” (Lee, phase 2)

“Well I just like going to school to learn, have fun and also come to meet friends” (Tim, phase 3)

Apart from Richard's comments in phase 1 about 'mixed' teachers, which is discussed in more detail later in this Chapter, and the issue all the boys had with science in phase 2 discussed here, the boys identified no major issues in relation to their feelings about school in answer to this question. However, this was not the case when they answered the question about school support, which is discussed in the next part of this section.

With regard to the issues the boys had with science in phase 2, all five boys indicated they had issues with repetition, particularly in their science lessons, such as Richard's comment about more focus on chemistry and Tim's on more focus on electronics. This could be explained by the Y5 teacher's inexperience with school science, but at the time I interviewed these boys in 2009, the requirement for schools to report science SATs test results had been removed by the U.K. Government, and research by the Wellcome Trust found that although some schools benefited by being free to be more

creative with the science curriculum, others indicated the amount of curriculum time for science had been reduced, as had the status of the subject in the school (WT, 2011).

School support for literacy & fairness

Boys were asked the question “Is there something the school could do to help you with your writing?” The boys’ responses are shown below:

Table 4.3 The Somerview boys’ perceptions of how the school could help them with literacy					
	Joel	Tim	Owen	Lee	Richard
phase 1	Technical help unfair	Technical help	Technical help	Resources	Technical help unfair
phase 2	Equipment	Bigger school	Equipment	Equipment	Resources
phase 3	Pedagogy	Pedagogy		Equipment	Pedagogy

As can be seen from the data in the table above there were distinct differences in the boys’ responses to the question in different phases. In phase 1 the boys were focused on the technical help provided for them by the school, but this was also a reflection of how they viewed writing in this phase and this is discussed more fully later in this Chapter. In phase 2 the boys commented on minor issues, such as sharper pencils and in phase 3, although Tim said he wanted stronger criticism from his teachers and Joel and Richard said they wanted more varied thesaurus activities, the other boys said the teachers already did this. Nevertheless, an issue several of the boys felt more strongly about emerged in phase 1 in relation to the boys’ perceptions of fairness, as illustrated in the dialogue below:

“They could put like more facilities for literacy ... cos I’m not good at stuff like punctuation and spelling ... certain people are not getting the help they need (Joel, phase 1)

“I’m not so good at handwriting and so I go into a group in the boardroom and get extra help” (Owen, phase 1)

Joel's comment indicates he feels the additional literacy support provided by the school for children is inadequate and not fairly distributed. Owen responds by commenting that he receives out-of-class support for handwriting. However, this began a debate within the group about the gender balance within the handwriting group and how children were selected for this group, as illustrated in Joel and Richard's comments below:

"Can I say something please ... no girl gets help it's only boys ... they're only taking out the boys". (Joel, phase 1)

"Well ... they take a certain group out when they say of boys and like one girl ... they say it's about space and I don't think it really is" (Richard, phase 1)

Although Owen made no critical comments about the handwriting group, of which he was a member, both Joel and Richard's comments indicate that they perceived the removal of boys from the class was unfair and more significantly, a reflection of the teacher's view that boys were less good at writing than girls. The Y4 teacher, in her interview with me, commented that the boys in her class had particular difficulty with handwriting and additional support was provided for them, but she did not comment on how the boys' felt about this. However, the Y5 teacher was aware of the boys' feelings about their handwriting and the barrier this posed to their progress, as her comments below show:

"Well those particular boys you'll be talking to, for those especially it's handwriting that – not necessarily from my input but their own perception and that's with other children in the class as well – if their handwriting isn't good or isn't clear then they really think that is the main barrier to their learning and earlier in the year I got a writing group together to try and work through some of those things, and I asked them what it was that stopped them and most of them said that they'd do a whole page of writing and they'd look at it and they thought it looked awful and so I always try to say it's the content and as long as I can read it I don't mind what the handwriting is like. ... "(Y5 teacher, phase 2)

The Y5 teacher's comments indicate that she was concerned the boys' perceived handwriting to be more important than content, and that she had sought to change this

perception by reassuring them that she was not going to judge their writing by their handwriting, but rather the content of their written work. Further, her consultation with the boys, to find out what their issues were, gave her a deeper insight into the specific problems they faced and how she might address these. This finding chimes with the findings of (Rudduck & Flutter 2000; MacBeath, et al, 2003), that it is important for teachers to have a dialogue with pupils to gain insights with which to inform their future practice. Although the Y5 teacher did not comment specifically on any changes she made to out-of-class provision for handwriting, the Y5 boys, in their interview, commented that the handwriting group had ended and as an alternative they could opt to attend a homework group after school or a lunchtime writing group, which Richard said he attended for additional support for grammar. Richard's readiness to admit he attended the lunchtime group indicated that he faced no loss of self-esteem in admitting attended this group, and I would suggest this was because he had chosen to attend rather than been selected by his teacher to attend.

Home & school support for literacy

Boys were asked the question "Do you write at home?" and "Is there anyone who helps you with your writing?" Their responses are summarised below:

Table 4.4 The support the Somerview boys received in their homes and school for their literacy learning					
	Joel	Tim	Owen	Lee	Richard
phase 1	Reading diary Homework Family	Reading diary Homework Mum & Dad	Reading diary Homework Lodger	Homework Independent	Letters of thanks Independent
phase 2	Practice tests Family	Reading diary Mum		Practice tests Reading diary Family	Practice tests Family
phase 3	Reading diary Family	Stories Dad		Reading diary Family	Reading diary Family

The data in the table above show that, with the exception Tim in phase 3, who wrote stories, the boys wrote at home for mainly functional purposes, such as to complete

their homework, their selective school practice papers or their reading diaries. Although these data would initially appear to show that the majority of the boys' preferred functional kinds of writing, this was not the case and I give a fuller discussion of the boys' preferences for particular genres later in this Chapter. The data also show, that with the exception of Lee and Richard in phase 1 and Owen in phases 2 and 3, the boys' received literacy support from their families at home and their reading diaries played a key role in the dialogue between the teachers and the boys' families.

Reading Response Diaries

The school literacy policy, summarised at the beginning of this Chapter, indicated that the children were encouraged to use their reading diaries to reflect on their writing and to write up their responses both at school and at home. However, in phase 1, Owen and Tim's comments below illustrate the support received from their families and the kind of writing activities they undertook at home, but also show they were reluctant to complete their reading diaries:

"I only write homework like spelling investigations and sometimes don't get round to reading diary entries but I've got my lodger at home helps me so." (Owen, phase 1)

"Well, ... sometimes my mum forces me to practise on my handwriting ... but I mostly do homework. Teachers tell me to like, do spelling, of course, or uhm, diary entries, but I don't do diary entries any more but I always pretend I actually do a diary entry, and then the teachers don't even notice." (Tim, phase 1)

Owen indicates a reluctance to write at home and to complete his reading diary but has a lodger who helps him. Tim indicates he willingly completes his homework but is reluctant to practice his handwriting and 'pretends' to do his diary entries and that the teachers 'don't even notice'. This latter comment was met with an intake of breath amongst the other boys and raised eyebrows, prompting the following response from Joel:

"That's appalling, you can't say that in public!" (Joel, phase 1)

The boys' evident shock and Joel's response to Tim's comment could indicate that the other boys thought Tim's comment was inappropriate. An explanation for this could be that the boys were shocked because Tim was being disloyal to the school in the presence of a comparative outsider, but it also indicates that the boys felt that the reading diary was an established and important part of school practice. However, in phase 2, Tim indicated a change in the way he perceived the reading diary, as did Lee, but for different reasons as illustrated in their comments below:

“Well, yes it keeps you, it keeps your brain working and also my mum tells me to do loads of like maths and handwriting and I used to be rubbish at handwriting, again my mum tells me to practice my handwriting again and again and one day when I'm doing a diary entry I find out that I'm writing beautiful handwriting and thinking, like, how did this happen.” (Tim, phase 2)

“I feel, that if you have a limited choice its better than just having to write about one thing like in our diary ... ” (Lee, phase 2)

Tim's comment indicates that he has seen that practising his handwriting has led to improvements in his handwriting in his reading diary and this has surprised and pleased him. Lee's comment indicates that having a choice about what to write in his reading diary has influenced the way he feels about completing it. An explanation for the changes in the way Lee viewed his reading diary in this phase was given in comments made by their Y5 teacher, when she said:

“It's quite interesting when it's free choice for home learning and that's where often I won't get one [*a diary entry*] ... so I have to really push for one and then the ones they really seem to enjoy doing is the diary format where they're imagining themselves in some sort of war or some sort of battle ... ” (Y5 teacher, phase 2)

The Y5 teacher's comment indicates that she has recognised the boys' enthusiasm for the reading diaries has waned and she has re-stimulated their interest by giving them a choice of genre in which to write up their reflections. In phase 3, when the boys were in Y6, Joel, Lee and Richard talked positively about competing their reading diaries, as shown in Joel and Lee's comments below:

“I only like them when it's very interesting but we have creative reading responses now on our books so it's much more interesting cos I kept on losing my reading diary and like it was such a mess and like I kept getting told off but if we had something good to do for it it's kind of a lot more fun.” (Joel, phase 3)

“With me, well, last term we were reading the Hobbit and that was, the reading diary was such fun because you got to design a board game and I did that on the computer and then we did creative reading responses and I did that on the computer” (Lee, phase 3)

The reason for the boys' renewed enthusiasm for completing their reading diaries was evident in my interview with the Y6 teacher, who commented:

“We [*the teachers*] had a discussion earlier on in the year about reading responses. As a school they go through writing reading responses throughout the years and they just grow as the children grow, and in Y6 they're really becoming, about a handful of children 10, were doing a good job, 10 children were doing an awful job and 10 children would do it when asked. So, it was really a mix. And we had a discussion on alternative ways to respond to a book and we came up with what we called 'the radical reading response', so it was different ways of responding to books, ... it might be to use I Can Animate [*animation software*] to make a short sequence in response to.... There are some who still, both boys and girls, who still would prefer to write to me about the book but there are some who've been motivated to respond in other ways because of opportunities to do those things. (Y6 teacher, phase 3)

This teacher's comments indicate that she has collaborated successfully with her colleagues to find a solution to the issue of some of the children's reluctance to complete their reading response diaries. However, she also recognises that the alternatives she has offered the children do not appeal to all the children, but that she has offered them a range of different ways to respond and this has motivated them to complete the reading diaries. Although this finding chimes with the findings of Stoll & Fink (1996), that collaborative school cultures can contribute to teachers' effectiveness in the classroom, my findings have also shown that it is important for teachers to be proactive in firstly identifying issues in their classroom and to ensure that within the solution, provision is made for the different needs of individual

children. My findings have also shown that the reading response diary used by the school to engage families in boys literacy learning and to encourage the boys to gain the habit of reading and writing at home and school, was a key factor in keeping the families engaged with the boys' literacy learning, particularly towards the end of Y6 when the boys' motivation was waning because they were soon to leave for secondary school. Further, the Y6 teacher also intervened to encourage the boys to read books that they would not necessarily have chosen, as illustrated in her comment below:

“... I read ... the Breadwinner and it's about a girl in Afghanistan, so the interest there is the setting, which is very topical and very current ... they [*the boys*] kept saying throughout “I'd never have picked this book up but I love it!” ... the boys were very willing to accept they'd never have picked it up and wouldn't have been persuaded to but because we had to, I made it happen, they actually at the end of it wanted to read the next one. ...” (Y6 teacher, phase 3)

This teacher's selection of a book where the key character is a strong female, indicates she is aware of the importance of challenging the boys' stereotypical beliefs about the roles of boys and girls. Further, her comment that the boys would not have read this if she had not actively intervened illustrates the importance of the teacher in influencing boys' choice of reading material. Although these findings resonate with the findings of others who argued that families were crucial in children's literacy learning (Jeynes, 2005; Dearing, et al, 2006 & 2008), my findings have also shown the importance of teacher intervention to encourage boys to engage with a wider range of reading material and the significance of a school system, such as the reading response diary, to engage families in boys' literacy learning.

In summary, with the exception of Lee in phase 1 and Tim in phase 3, whose initial reactions were positive about school, the boys' comments indicate that they were mostly ambivalent, in that their feelings were dependent on other factors such as school subjects or their classmates but most importantly their teachers. The proactive stance of the Y5 teacher to find out what the issues were for the boys meant that she was able to make changes to the out-of-class literacy support which resulted in no loss of self-esteem for the boys. Similarly, the Y6 teacher's ability to firstly identify the problem the boys had with completing their reading diaries, secondly to collaborate

with her colleagues to find a solution, and thirdly to identify and recommend books that boys were interested in reading, meant that the boys, with the exception of Owen, continued to read and write at home and school which enabled the teacher to maintain a dialogue with their families, about their literacy learning, until the end of Y6 and helped the boys to develop the habit of reading and writing. Nevertheless, for boys such as Owen who received less support at home from his family, there was additional school-based literacy provision at lunchtime or after school for those who opted for it. Finally, the provision of choice over opting into or out of additional literacy support and in the genre for writing in the reading diaries was enabling and gave the children a sense of autonomy, the latter of which I discuss more fully later in this Chapter.

The Somerview boys' feelings about the classroom

The boys' feelings about the classroom emerged in their answers to questions I asked them relating to what hampered their learning, how they were treated by their teachers and what things made it easier for them to write. I begin with what hampered their learning.

Barriers to learning

Boys were asked the question "Is there anything that stops you from learning?" Their responses in phase 1 are shown below:

Table 4.5 Barriers to learning for the Somerview boys in their classroom					
	Joel	Tim	Owen	Lee	Richard
phase 1	Chatting	Chatting	Misbehaviour	Chatting	Chatting & misbehaviour
phase 2	Repetition in science	Repetition in science	Repetition in science	Repetition in science	Repetition in science
phase 3	Quiet		Chatting	Chatting	Chatting

As can be seen from the data in the table above there were different patterns in their responses in the different phases of this study. In phase 2 the boys again mentioned issues with repetition in their science lessons, as discussed earlier in this Chapter. However, although they commented on chatting in phase 1 and 3, there were differences in the extent to which this posed a barrier, as illustrated in the dialogue below:

“Well, I think that um when I’m being near people who are having conversations and it isn’t to do with the work and it’s quite distracting and I find it hard um talking to other people because sometimes they mistake what I’m saying” (Lee, phase 1)

“Same as most people, talking and distracting like if someone has a rubber and they keep throwing it around and trying to get it” (Richard, phase 1)

In phase 1, all five boys said they were distracted from their learning by other children chatting about things that were not related to their work or by the misbehaviour of other children in class. This could be explained partly by their immaturity in this phase or, but my data have shown that a more likely explanation relates to the unresolved issues the boys had with their literacy learning in the classroom in this phase. In phase 3 the boys talked again about distractions in class, but they did not agree on whether it was conducive to work in a quiet or a noisy classroom, as illustrated in their comments below:

“Sometimes it’s like a distraction cos sometimes like when I’m sitting next to someone I like to talk to I just talk to them and sometimes I forget I have to do work and I like need to catch up.” (Richard, phase 3)

“I kind of like noise, I work and talk so when I can talk about something except from the work I think I work better...” (Joel, phase 3)

Although Richard indicates that he likes to talk when he is working and that this sometimes distracts him from his work, Joel comments that he can concentrate when he is talking and likes to hear a certain level of noise in the classroom. Although this shows that individual children have different preferences for the way in which they learn best, the contrast in their comments also indicate that the level of noise was less of a barrier to the boys’ learning in phase 3 than it was in phase 1. Further, the lack of comments about misbehaviour in phases 2 and 3 reveal that the boys were more engaged in their learning in phases 2 and 3 than they were in phase 1 and the reasons for this related to changes in their classroom climate, and it is to a discussion of this that I now turn.

Perceptions of fairness in relation to gender

Boys were asked the question “Do you think teachers treat boys and girls the same?” Their responses are summarised in the table below:

Table 4.6 The Somerview boys’ perceptions of the way they were treated by their teachers					
	Joel	Tim	Owen	Lee	Richard
phase 1	Girls favoured	Girls favoured	Girls favoured		Equal
phase 2	Depends on behaviour & teacher	Depends on behaviour	Depends on behaviour & teacher	Depends on behaviour & teacher	Depends on behaviour
phase 3	Depends on behaviour				Depends on behaviour

As can be seen from the data in the table above, Richard disagrees with his classmates and thinks that girls and boys were treated equally. However, there are shifts in the boys’ perceptions of how they are treated by their teachers in phases 2 and 3, where

they all perceived they were treated according to their behaviour not their gender. Some comments made by the boys in phase 1, illustrating how they feel girls and boys are treated, are shown below:

“I find that the girls get treated a bit better than the boys ... but I don't know why it's just they do, they get praised more they always get chosen first in everything it's just, I don't know why it just happens ...” (Joel, phase 1)

“Sometimes its just cos teachers just sometimes comes up to me and just goes ooh that's really titchy writing ... and a girl can be the same ... *[but is not criticised]*” (Tim, phase 1)

“What I want to say is, I don't want, I think they're mixed, some boys get told off more, some girls get told off more ...” (Richard, phase 1)

Joel commented that he felt the girls got more praise, Tim felt he was unfairly criticised for his small writing and Owen agreed with Joel, but Richard disagrees and indicates that he thinks that there is no difference in the way boys and girls are disciplined by their teachers. Although the other three boys did not change their views about the harsher judgements they thought they received for their writing, they did agree with Richard that they were not disciplined more harshly than the girls. By contrast, in phases 2 and 3, there was stronger consensus on this issue, with all five boys indicating they thought that children were disciplined more fairly. Owen and Joel's comments below were typical of the boys' comments in this phase:

“Well, I think that teachers, well it depends on whose behaviour is best I think that in our class that because girls have been sent out more than boys in our class .. I agree with Lee, I think it depends on the teacher and the children's behaviour ... “ (Owen, phase 2).

“Um, it depends again on the individual.” (Joel, phase 3)

Owen and Joel's comments illustrate the general feeling in the group in phases 2 and 3, that children were treated by their teachers according to their behaviour not their gender. Although the boys' class teachers, in phases 1, 2 or 3, did not explicitly

indicate that they treated boys and girls differently, the way they talked about children highlighted differences in their perceptions, as illustrated in their comments below:

“Boys need more encouragement than girls to start writing” (Y4, teacher phase 1)

The Y4 teacher talks about the boys as a group who need more encouragement than the girls, indicating that she viewed children through their gender rather than as individuals. By contrast the Y5 and Y6 teachers talk about the children as individuals, rather than as groups of boys and groups of girls, as illustrated in their comments below:

“The other thing was, with these children [*boys and girls*] who were finding it really hard to just get started ... and we have been ... talking about it directly. You know, ‘why do you find writing hard, what can we do?’ But yeah I think that helped us plan our steps, our things to tackle in those sessions.” (Y5 teacher, phase 2).

“I would say it’s quite individual ... Some can be very motivated, if you just give them a little bit of you, that can be just enough to tweak it, and that could be a couple of the boys I’m thinking about and a couple of the girls too ...” (Y6 teacher, phase 3)

Although the Y5 teacher found the class reluctant to write, she did not identify the boys as a reluctant group. Further, her use of a pupil voice approach to consult with the children raised her awareness of the barriers the children faced and this enabled her to plan how to adapt her practice to help the children overcome the barriers they faced. The Y6 teacher, like the Y5 teacher, referred throughout her interview to the children as individuals, with different strengths and weaknesses and that she supported them as individuals to overcome the barriers they faced. Both the Y5 and Y6 teachers’ comments indicate they were highly sensitive to the needs of the children as individuals and, as discussed next in this Chapter, this was a key factor in influencing both their classroom practice and the boys’ response to their literacy lessons in the classroom. Although my findings from phase 1 concur with the findings of others, that boys had a strong perception that they were treated less fairly in the classroom than girls (Holden, 2002; Myhill & Jones, 2006), my findings have also shown that this is subject to change when they are taught by different teachers who are able to see

children as individuals and where they are proactive in identifying and resolving the barriers individual children face in the classroom.

Autonomy & motivation

Boys were asked the question “What sort of things make it easy to write?” The boys talked about peer partners, choice in writing and computers for writing as summarised below.

Table 4.7 Teaching strategies that motivated the Somerview boys to write					
	Joel	Tim	Owen	Lee	Richard
phase 1	Peer partner		Peer partner	Peer partner	Peer partner; Computer
phase 2	Choice; Computer	Choice; Computer	Choice	Choice; Computer	Choice; Computer
phase 3	Peer partner; Computer	Peer partner; Computer	Computer	Computer	Peer partner; Computer

As can be seen from the data in the table above, the boys focused their comments on peer partners in phase 1, choice and computers in phase 2 and peer partners and computers in phase 3. However, there were differences between the phases in the way the boys talked about working with their peers and their use of computers, and this related to the effectiveness of the children to write collaboratively with their peers and to the skills and knowledge they had in using computers for writing. With regard to choice, as the boys comments related mainly to their preferences for writing in a particular genre and this was a key factor in influencing their feelings about writing, I return to a fuller discussion of this later in this Chapter. I begin here by discussing the changes in the boys' response to writing with peer partners between phases 1 and 3.

Owen and Lee commented positively on writing with his peers, but Lee, Joel and Richard identified behavioural issues with other children in their group, as illustrated in Lee's comment below:

"I like writing ... because in groups like the group helping me to plan and things."
(Owen, phase 1)

"Well, I like to write ... and we're in working partners and we, me and my partner was one that was very good, well we think it was ... but sometimes when you're writing in groups, people sometimes say, oh I want to write everything ... and then they end up having an argument and then the whole table gets told off ..." (Lee, phase 1)

Although Owen and Lee comment that working with their peers is helpful, Lee and Joel indicate that the groups do not always work together effectively because there was not always equal participation. By contrast, in phase 3 none of the boys mentioned relationship issues when working with their peers, and the comments below were typical of those made by the boys:

"A peer, a partner, it helps a lot because I've got time to plan so if you have a friend and he is writing the same story as you, you kind of, I don't really know how to say it but it makes you feel a little bit better." (Joel, phase 3)

"Well I think like, when it's an atmosphere that you're in, say we're all working in partners like Joel said I would feel like so happy to work ..." (Richard, phase 3)

"And you can get ideas from their ideas and sometimes I find it really hard to get the opening line." (Tim, phase 3)

"I'm the opposite of Joel I really prefer working by myself but the atmosphere does help." (Lee, phase 3)

Joel, Richard and Tim all indicate they are more able to write with their peers than on their own and their comments indicate they are able to write more effectively with their peers in this phase than they were in phase 1. Although Lee comments that he prefers to write by himself in this phase, his comment also indicates that both he and Richard appreciate the improvements in the atmosphere in the class when children are writing with their peer partners. Although one explanation for the improvements in the 'atmosphere in the class' when children were writing with their peers could be that children are more mature in this phase, but a more likely explanation emerged in comments made by their class teachers in phases 2 and 3, as illustrated below:

“... we do lots of peer assessment ... partner work for writing ... editing seems less arduous when there's someone to share it with ... rehearse it, write it, read it that's what I'm trying to get them into at the moment.” (Y5 teacher, phase 2)

“... we've really worked hard on talking to their partner about their ideas before they write. I think that, there's a moment when that is so important. It's that business of, if you've heard your own voice before you do something you take ownership of it and I almost make it an imperative until the day when we do the SATs test and we can't speak, I don't think I ever say to them “don't talk about it before you start”. I positively encourage it, ...” (Y6 teacher, phase 3)

Both the Y5 and the Y6 teacher have encouraged children to take responsibility for their writing, either through reviewing and editing their writing or through sharing ideas before writing and, I would suggest, the Y6 teacher's comment ‘we've really worked hard’ indicates that she has ensured the children know how to collaborate effectively with their peers. This finding concurs with the findings of Mercer (2000) who argued that constructive talk with peers and other adults helped children to understand language, but that children needed to be taught the ground rules in order to engage effectively in peer talk.

Similarly, when the boys talked about their use of computers for writing, the contrasting comments they made also related to their knowledge and skills in using the technology. Lee's comment below was typical of the comments made by Tim and Richard and Joel's comment is similar to the comments made by Owen, as illustrated below:

“Well, it's the computers. I find it easier to type on the computers because I'm quite fast and we only ever do it for really long pieces of writing like when we were doing this thing on the Temeraire and we did this diary about a jobber on a ship and I did this really long piece involving miles and I typed it up on the computer which was quite good for me.” (Lee, phase 2)

“I think it's a lot harder on the computer because it just takes longer, you have to do space [*on a keyboard*], you have to do spellcheck.” (Joel, phase 2)

Lee's comment indicates that he was confident in using a computer and more able to sustain his writing for longer periods of time whereas Joel's comment show that using a computer has slowed down his writing because he has to 'do space' and he has to 'do spellcheck'. However, Joel and Owen's comments in phase 3, that they were working on their keyboard skills in their own time, indicate the enthusiasm these boys had to use computers for writing. The Y5 and Y6 teachers' comments also illustrate the benefits of using a computer but also highlight some of the issues, as shown in their comments below:

"... And linked to that, the Temeraire writing we did, that was using laptops or using ICT, so that wasn't so much of a problem then [*the boys' concern about their handwriting*]... but it also brought in some frustration, because of course they're not all touch-typers ... but that's a big area for development." (Y5 teacher, phase 2)

"... I think it's learning how to use a computer as well, it's what you're writing and how you're writing ... word processing and children are much more able to think and plan in a way and they're worried about the look of it, change the fonts and sizes and it's complete ownership of the way it looks without having to worry about your hand aching ... (Y6 teacher, phase 3)

Although the Y5 and Y6 teachers point to the benefits of using a computer to reduce the burden of handwriting on children and the Y6 teacher highlights the importance of children having ownership of the editing process, both teachers point to the need for children to have the knowledge and skills needed in order to use a computer effectively. Although others have pointed to the benefits of children using computers for writing, such as the motivational benefits of using computers (Cox, 1997), improvements in self-esteem as a result of being able to edit their own writing (Lewis, et al, 1999) and to improvements in the quality, length and presentation of their writing (Goldberg, 2003; Passey, 2004), my findings have shown that children gain most benefit when they have regular access to computers and are taught how to use them for writing.

Although my findings have shown that, in certain circumstances, teaching approaches such as peer partners and computers for writing can motivate boys to write, and can contribute to their autonomy as writers, I have also shown that this is only the case

when their teachers ensure they know how to collaborate effectively with their peers and how to use a word processor to create, edit and present their writing.

In summary, my findings have shown that there were improvements in the boys' behaviour and response to their literacy lessons in the classroom in phases 2 and 3 in contrast to phase 1 and this was the result of changes in the classroom climate created by their teachers. Although in phase 1, with the exception of Richard, the boys felt they were not always treated fairly by their teachers, this was not the case in phases 2 and 3 where they all had a stronger sense of equality in the classroom and showed a greater sense of responsibility for their own behaviour. I have shown that the reasons for this related to their teacher's ability to see them as individuals, rather than through their gender, and their sensitivity and proactive approach to identifying and resolving the barriers the boys faced in their writing. Further, my findings have shown that the boys were more motivated to write and had greater autonomy over their writing when they knew how to write collaboratively with their peers and, as Joel pointed out, when they had the pre-requisite skills and knowledge to use computers for writing and, as discussed earlier in this Chapter, when they had more choice over the genre for writing in reading diaries.

The Somerview boys' feelings about literacy

Gendered preferences for school subjects

Boys were asked the question "What do you like to do best at school?" Their responses are summarised below:

Table 4.8 The Somerview boys' preferred school subjects					
	Joel	Tim	Owen	Lee	Richard
phase 1	Science	Maths & drama	Science	Science	PE
phase 2	Maths	Maths, science, history & drama	Maths & science	Maths, science, history	Science, history, literacy
phase 3	Maths, Literacy, but depends on writing task & PE	Drama, singing & art	PE, playtime, & chemistry	Chemistry, maths	PE, playtime, art & maths

Although the data in the table above show the boys' predominantly preferred subjects that required the least amount of literacy across all three phases of this study, there is a shift in their preferences, where in phases 2 and 3, with the exception of Owen, the boys included history or literacy in their preferences. The boys' strongly negative feelings about literacy in phase 1 are best illustrated in the comments made by Joel, Owen and Lee as shown below:

"... Literacy because I'm terrible at it" (Joel, phase 1)

"I'm not that keen on handwriting ... I think it's because I'm just not that talented at it" (Owen, phase 1)

"I don't like literacy because I'm not very good at it ..." (Lee, phase 1)

The vocabulary the boys have used 'terrible', 'not talented', 'not very good' indicate that they had low self-belief in relation to literacy. Bandura (1977) argued that a person's self-belief in relation to their potential to achieve a task is derived from how they interpret their own performance, how they compare themselves to others, the feedback they get from others and the anxiety or stress they feel. I would suggest the reason for the boys' negative perceptions of themselves as literacy learners, as discussed earlier in this Chapter, derived from their daily experiences in the classroom

in this phase, where, with the exception of Richard, they felt the girls were treated better and received more praise and that boys received harsher criticism of their writing. Although my findings partially agree with others, that boys were keen to stand in opposition to subjects they believed were favoured by girls in order to reinforce their masculinity and reject pursuits they associated with femininity (Jackson D., 1998; Epstein, 1998; Martino, 1999), my study has shown that this was not fixed, as illustrated in Richard and Joel's comments in phases 2 and 3 below:

"I like science and history and stuff ... I like literacy and stuff like that as well at school." (Richard, phase 2)

"My favourite subject in this school is, um well not really dance or anything as I like it more outside school, maths and it depends what we're writing in literacy I kind of like and PE." (Joel, phase 3)

These comments indicate that both Richard and Joel were feeling more positive about literacy in phases 2 and 3 than they were in phase 1, and as discussed earlier in this Chapter, the reasons for this related to the equally high expectations the teachers had of boys and girls and their proactive approach to addressing and resolving barriers the boys faced in their writing. In this climate the boys' experienced greater success in their writing and, I would suggest, this has influenced their perceptions of themselves as literacy learners. Further evidence for this is in the comments the boys made in phases 2 and 3 in relation to their views about boys' and girls' achievement in different school subjects and it is to a discussion of this that I now turn.

Beliefs about differential performance

Boys were asked the question "Do you think boys or girls do better in school or do you think they are about the same?" Their responses are summarised in the table below:

Table 4.9 The Somerview boys' perceptions of girls' and boys' achievement					
	Joel	Tim	Owen	Lee	Richard
phase 1	Diff in diff subjects	Diff in diff subjects	Diff in diff subjects	Diff in Diff subjects	Equal
phase 2	Equal in the workplace	Equal in the workplace	Rumours that girls do better	Biological differences	Boys work harder in the workplace
phase 3	Diff in diff subjects	Equal	Equal	Equal	Equal

As can be seen in the data in the table above, in phase 1, with the exception of Richard, the boys thought girls' and boys' performed differently in school subjects, but in phase 3 only one boy continued to believe this. Some typical comments made by the boys are shown below:

"I think girls can do stuff more kind of like handwriting, literacy and art and sometimes in PE but boys are better at like science and physical really physical work out." (Joel, phase 1)

"Well, I've read a book that girls' brains are different from men's brains ... and how many neurons they have in their and according to that book they are on average the same but each perform better at different tasks like girls are more likely to be ambidextrous" (Lee, phase 2)

"Well, I think it's just about the same they are both really balancing because the thing is some boys are good at some things and some boys are bad at some things and the same for girls so it's mixed." (Tim, phase 3)

Joel's comment in phase 1 was typical of the comments made by the majority of the boys, indicating they held strongly gendered beliefs about girls' and boys' aptitudes in different school subjects. However, Richard did not hold this view and a fuller account of the interaction between the boys following Richard's declared disagreement, is given in Appendix 12 of this thesis. However, in phases 2 and 3, with the exception of Joel in phase 3, none of the boys related their comments to their experiences of differential achievement in school subjects, they either related their

comments to factors taking place outside the school, such as the workplace, or in the case of Lee, gender differences he had read about in a book. This indicates that their day-to-day experiences in the classroom were very different in phases 2 and 3, as discussed earlier in this Chapter, where the boys felt they were treated equally with the girls, experienced more success in their writing and had stronger self-belief as a result. Although Joel indicated he believed girls' and boys' achieved differently in different school subjects in phase 3, this did conflict to some extent with other comments he made in this phase where he included literacy amongst one of his preferred subjects. These findings agree with those who argued that boys' feelings about literacy were strongly influenced by gender stereotypes, where boys' viewed literacy as 'female' and to preserve their masculinity they rejected this as a school subject (Epstein, 1998; Jackson D., 1998; Martino, 1999), but I have also shown that changes in the classroom climate in which they were learning had a strong impact on their self-belief (Bandura, 1977) and on their view of themselves as literacy learners.

In summary, my findings have shown that, with the exception of Owen in phase 1, the boys' showed less strongly gendered preferences for school subjects in phases 2 and 3, where they included either literacy or history in their list of preferred subjects. Further, with the exception of Joel in phase 3, my findings have shown the boys held less strongly gender stereotypical beliefs about boys' and girls' achievement in school subjects. I have argued that the boys' perceptions of themselves as literacy learners were strongly influenced by their daily experiences in the classroom. My findings have shown that where teachers had high expectations of both boys and girls, the boys experienced greater success in their writing, and this strengthened their self-belief, improved their perception of themselves as literacy learners and their attitude to literacy as a school subject. I now turn to a discussion about the boys' feelings about writing.

The Somerview boys' feelings about writing

Boys were asked the question "Do you like writing?" However, as the boys did not respond with any comments on what they liked to write in phase 1, I asked them a

supplementary question: "What kinds of things do you like to write?" A summary of their responses is shown in the table below:

Table 4.10 The Somerview boys' feelings about writing					
	Joel	Tim	Owen	Lee	Richard
phase 1	Hates writing; likes reports	Dislikes when lacks ideas; likes poems & stories	Dislikes when lacks ideas	Hates his handwriting; likes news articles	Dislikes when lacks ideas; likes poems & stories
phase 2	Conditional on genre; likes reports	Conditional on genre; likes creative dialogue & stories	Conditional on length	Conditional on genre; likes factual & instructions	Conditional on structure for writing; likes poems & stories
Phase 3	Conditional on genre; likes reports	Conditional on genre; likes stories	Conditional length & computers; likes descriptive	Conditional on genre & computers; likes reports & instructions	Conditional on length & genre; likes creative

As can be seen from data in the table above, there was a shift in the way the boys responded to this question, from prefacing their response with what they hated or disliked about writing in phase 1 to a more positive response where they prefaced their answers with what they liked about writing in phases 2 and 3. The change in the boys' feelings about writing are best illustrated in the comments made by Joel, Lee and Richard in phases 1, 2 and 3 respectively, shown below:

"I absolutely hate writing". (Joel, phase 1)

"Well, I enjoy being very critical like Joel and I also like writing about science and history and like instructions about different things, like how the Egyptians got water from the Nile and .." (Lee, phase 2)

“If it’s short writing I don’t mind it, if it’s long ... in the last few paragraphs I don’t know what to write about and I just completely zone out ... I like creative writing ...”
(Richard, phase 3)

In phase 1 Joel was unequivocal in his ‘hatred’ of writing, Lee said he had difficulty with handwriting and thought he had ‘rubbish handwriting’ and Tim, Owen and Richard linked their dislike of writing to a lack of ideas for writing. However, all the boys in phase 1 indicated they had difficulty with the technical aspects of writing in this phase and this is an issue I discuss in more detail in this section. By contrast, in phases 2 and 3 the boys prefaced their comments with what they liked about writing, such as writing in their preferred genre or short writing tasks, and this is discussed more fully in this section. Owen and, to a lesser extent Richard also mentioned a preference for shorter pieces of writing. But, unlike Owen, Richard only mentioned this once during his three interviews with me, indicating that this was less of an issue for him than it was for Owen, who mentioned it in phase 2 and phase 3 of this study. The boys also mentioned their use of computers and this has been discussed earlier in this Chapter. I now turn to a discussion of the boys’ perceived difficulties with the technical aspects of writing.

Difficulties with the technical aspects of writing

Throughout this Chapter the boys have referred to their difficulties with handwriting, but the majority of these comments were made in phase 1 of this study, when the boys were in Y4, where they used very strong language to describe their perceptions of their ability with handwriting, such as Tim’s ‘rubbish’ and Owen’s ‘not that talented’ to Lee’s ‘hate’ of his handwriting. Nevertheless, in response to my question “What difficulties do you have with writing?”, the boys in phase 1 responded as shown below;

“Punctuation and spelling.” (Joel, phase 1)

“Well, I find the spelling easy, but I always well when I come to describing I always think, ooh, what shall I describe, ooh, that cat was really furry and wet or something like that and always come up with a bad description.” (Tim, phase 1)

"I think, that when I'm writing I find it hard to write sometimes but I find it difficult to use grammar and punctuation and um joining up." (Owen, phase 1)

"I find grammar hard and sometimes sitting next to the wrong people." (Lee, phase 1)

"I'm ok on grammar but I'm always getting stuck on full stops and like the man walked down the street and I don't put a full stop in and then it's like a massive long story and then like put in a full stop at the end of it and then." (Richard, phase 1)

These comments indicate that the boys were over-concerned with the technical aspects of writing, such as punctuation, spelling, handwriting and grammar, and were unable to see beyond these aspects, to the meaning and purpose of their writing. Although one explanation for the boys' difficulties with these aspects could be attributed to their immaturity in this phase, another reason emerged in my interview with the Y4 teacher, as illustrated below:

"... in Y4 we're giving them all the skills they need..." (Y4 teacher, phase 1)

The Y4 teacher's comment indicates that she has focused her teaching on the technical aspects of writing. I would suggest the perceptions the boys had about their difficulties with the technical aspects of writing in this phase, and their inability to see the meaning and purpose of their writing, were related to the Y4 teacher's focus for teaching. These findings chime with the findings of others, that a heavy focus on the technical aspects of writing, such as spelling, gives children the notion that this is the key to success and may inhibit their own attempt at writing and may lead to children having a restricted view of writing (Czerniewska, 1992; Warrington & Younger, 2006). However, with the exception of Owen & Lee who continued to cite difficulty with their handwriting, none of the other boys mentioned difficulties with the technical aspects of writing and the reasons for this are discussed in the next section of this Chapter. This is not to suggest that the boys no longer had difficulties with these aspects, rather, that over time practice had partly diminished the difficulties and they were less concerned with these aspects in Y5 than they were in Y4, and it is to a discussion of this that I now turn.

Choice & genre

As shown in the table at the beginning of this section, with the exception of Owen, in phases 2 and 3, the boys included their liking for a particular genre in their list of reasons for liking writing as illustrated in Tim and Lee's comments in phase 2 below.

“Well, I just like writing reviews being critical (Joel, phase 2)

“Well, I like being able to choose what you are able to write, it's because um, like if um, it depends on what your sense of humour is, it depends on what is your favourite bit of writing, like being creative, like writing dialogue or writing a story” (Tim, phase 2)

Joel and Tim's comments indicate that they are more focused on the genres in which they liked to write than they are with the technical aspects of writing and that Tim likes being able to choose his own genre and that they both had very different genre preferences. An explanation for the change in their feelings about writing in this phase is illustrated in the Y5 teacher's comments below:

“... it's easy to get caught up in looking at the strategy [*NLS*], getting caught in 'paragraphs this' and 'direct speech that' and you know I think those are important but within the overarching context.”. (Y5 teacher, phase 2)

The Y5 teacher is aware of the technical focus for teaching embedded in the *NLS* which she is using to guide her teaching, but indicates that she has adapted her teaching to change the focus for teaching from a technical focus to one where her focus is on the context, meaning and purpose of the writing. Although there are different views about whether the skills of writing should be taught directly (Medwell & Wray (2007) or in context (Wyse & Jones, 2001), my findings agree with D'Arcy (2000) that the technical focus for teaching writing underpinning the *NLS* was not the best way to teach children to write because it did not provide enough opportunity for children to make sense of their learning through writing.

The Y5 teacher was also aware that children have different genre preferences, and the way she has addressed this in her teaching is shown in her comments below:

“... what I’ve seen over the years – they [*the children*] can enjoy writing but when the stimulus is right for them so when its something that they are interested in ... now most children will have started writing after five minutes [*the children did not do this at the beginning of Y5*]. ... so my writing tasks are much more open ... so that children can chose their own interests – because of course I can’t think of one that would be right for everyone – and that has helped them.” (Y5 teacher, phase 2)

The Y5 teacher makes no assumptions about what genres boys and girls prefer, rather, her use of open-ended tasks has enabled the boys to have a choice over their genre for writing, and Tim and Richard have been able to engage in creative writing that they enjoy and Lee, Joel and Owen with factual writing. These findings conflict with the findings of Gorman et al (1998), that boys have a strong preference for factual writing and girls for creative writing but agrees with the findings of Myhill (2001) that there was little research evidence that boys preferred factual as opposed to creative writing, rather, boys liked being able to “choose what to write about and to take their writing in a direction of their choice” (Jones & Myhill, 2007). Further, although some have written that whole class teaching approach embedded in the NLS has led to less choice and independence for children, particularly at KS2, (Wyse, 2001; Grainger, et al, 2003; Tymms & Merrel, 2007; Moss, 2007), my findings have shown that some teachers were able to adapt the NLS teaching programme to successfully give the children more choice over their writing.

Stamina & longer writing tasks

As illustrated in the table at the beginning of this section, Owen in phase 2 and Owen and to a lesser extent Richard in phase 3, linked their liking of writing to the length of the writing task, as illustrated in Owen’s comments below:

“Um, probably short or as Lee said on the computer, but um short. (Owen, phase 3)

However, Owen's comment was untypical of the comments made by the Somerview boys who either did not mention the length of the writing task as a difficulty for them or said they enjoyed longer pieces of writing, as Tim's comment below shows:

"It depends on what it is ... I like writing stories ... I like to make my story long and interesting ... also, it doesn't really help me if I'm timed ... and I only once got really good writing in that ..." (Tim, phase 3)

However, Tim's comment about his dislike of timed writing was also echoed by the other boys, mainly because they felt under pressure when they knew they were being timed. Nevertheless, this was no surprise to me as when I interviewed the boys they had recently taken their SATs writing test, where they were required to write for 45 minutes and had spent time in class prior to the test preparing for the SATs writing task. However, the challenges of teaching writing in this phase and how the Y6 teacher addressed these, are illustrated in her comments below:

"... I think we do spend a lot of time writing and it can be a hard slog. I think it's tiring for them and always coming up with new ideas. We do expect a lot from them, I think we ask them to write in so many ways and really quite complex things, it's hard work, but they're always very pleased when they've got their finished product. If you ask them to find something they like, they'll always find you a piece of writing that they've enjoyed having a go at and they're proud of and so I think they do but there are things that they don't enjoy, and I would probably say that's across the board. (Y6 teacher, phase 3)

The Y6 teacher indicates that she has increased the range, complexity and length of the writing tasks she has set for the children in Y6, has high expectations and has the children to persevere in the face of new challenges. As a result the children have gained experience of writing in a wider range of genres and topics they would not necessarily have chosen. I would suggest, with the exception of Owen, the boys' lack of comments about longer pieces of writing, indicated that they were more able to sustain their writing because they had learned to work hard and persevere in their writing tasks, despite not always enjoying the task, and that this had strengthened their self-belief. This finding resonates with the findings of Dweck (2000) that children's

response to learning is not fixed and that with effort and guidance, they can develop a response to learning where they value effort and are able to persist in the face of difficulties.

In summary, there was a shift in the boys' feelings about writing between the phases, from strongly negative feelings in phase 1, where Joel and Lee used words like 'hate' to more positive feelings where all the boys prefaced their responses by talking about aspects of writing they 'liked'. I have suggested that a significant factor in influencing the boys' feelings about writing was a change in the focus for teaching writing, from a technical focus in Y4 to a genre focus in Y5 and Y6 which resulted in the boys viewing writing less as a technical activity and more as a means of communication. Further, the Y5 teacher's recognition that the boys had different writing preferences and the introduction of greater choice of genre, enabled the boys to follow their own interests and this motivated them to engage with their writing. Although there were distinct challenges in Y6 as the length and complexity of the writing tasks increased, and this proved particularly difficult for one boy, Owen, the Y6 teacher did manage to prepare the boys for these tasks without undermining their self-belief or the more positive feelings about writing they had in this phase.

Conclusion & Discussion

In conclusion, my interviews with the five Somerview boys indicated that although they showed negative attitudes towards literacy and writing in Y4, their response was more positive when they were in Y5 and Y6. In Y4 the boys showed a dislike of literacy as a school subject, had particular difficulty with the technical aspects of writing, often using this as a smokescreen to avoid writing activities, and, thought they were treated unfairly by their teachers in their classroom. However, this situation reversed when the boys were in Y5 and Y6, best exemplified in Joel's responses in Y4 where he stated "I don't like literacy ... I absolutely hate writing" to Y6 where he said: "it depends on what we're writing in literacy...I like writing reports...I like writing a review...it's really fun for me....". Joel's comments were typical of the shift in the boys' comments about writing as they progressed from Y4 to Y6. I have argued that the Somerview boys' attitude to writing was not fixed and could change when the boys

were learning in different classroom climates, but most importantly, I have shown that where their teachers viewed them as individuals, rather than through the lens of their gender, this had a significant influence on their classroom practice.

My findings support the findings of those who argued that boys' feelings about school subjects were strongly influenced by gender stereotypes, with literacy often rejected by boys because they associated it with femininity (Jackson, D. 1998; Epstein, 1998; Martino, 1999) and that teachers' gendered perceptions of boys and girls in literacy, with boys seen to be underachieving in comparison to girls, lowered their expectations of boys in their classrooms (Jones & Myhill, 2004; Myhill & Jones, 2006). However, my findings have shown that this situation was not fixed and reversed in Y5 and Y6, highlighting the unique conditions that positively influenced the boys' feelings about literacy and about themselves as writers.

In Y5 and Y6 the Somerview boys had a strong sense of equality in their classrooms, greater autonomy in their writing, and with the exception of Owen, continued to build their stamina as writers through writing at home and school. Most importantly, my findings have shown that the changes in the conditions these boys experienced in their classroom were the result of their teachers' proactive approach to addressing barriers the boys faced in their writing, effectively leaving them 'no place to hide'. The Y5 teacher's use of pupil voice was crucial in her understanding of the particular barrier the children faced in their writing at the beginning of Y5 and that it was not just the boys who were reluctant to write, but that there were equally as many girls who were reluctant. The changes she made to her teaching included: focusing her teaching on content, purpose and audience rather than the skills of writing; changes to the out-of-class provision for writing to one where the children could opt in rather than be selected; greater autonomy in writing through the use of choice, computers, peer partners and creating a classroom climate where the children felt they were treated equally. In these conditions, the Somerview boys were more motivated to write, something Bruning & Horn (2000) argued was essential in the difficult process of learning to write and were able to find their own voice as writers. Although the restrictions of SATs preparation meant the Y6 teacher was not able to make provision for the children to have the extent of choice over genres or the length of writing task that they had experienced in Y5, she did ensure they had the opportunity to have

autonomy over their writing through peer partner writing and the use of computers for writing. Further, this teachers' collaboration with colleagues, to find a solution to the children's waning interest in completing their home-school reading response diaries, ensured she was able to maintain a dialogue with the boys' families about their literacy learning. This teacher's intervention, with the exception of Owen who did not mention literacy support at home, helped the boys to build stamina as writers and to sustain longer pieces of writing in Y6. However, most importantly her communication to the children that she believed they could achieve despite the more challenging nature of the tasks she set, contributed to the boys' strong self-belief in this phase, something Bandura (1977) argued was needed if people are to persist in the face of difficulties.

Finally, my findings have shown that although the Somerview School policy outlined a holistic approach to teaching literacy, the influence of this on the boys' attitude to writing was dependent on the way the individual teachers' interpreted this policy and the unique climates they created in their classrooms. This was most evident in the reversal of the boys' attitude to writing when they entered Y5 and Y6 where these teachers, in contrast to the Y4 teacher: viewed children as individuals; had high expectations of all children in writing; made provision for children to have greater autonomy over their writing; quickly identified barriers and, after consultation with the children and their colleagues, adapted their pedagogy to meet the children's changing needs as they progressed through the school. Although I did not have access to the individual performance data of the boys I interviewed and cannot comment on any improvements in their writing, my findings have shown that in the conditions just described, the boys all had more positive attitudes towards literacy and writing, had stronger self-belief and were able to find their own voice as writers.

I now move on to explore my findings from the second of the three schools where I conducted this study.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS: ESTATESIDE

Introduction

In this Chapter I provide an analysis of the data from Estateside School, collected through focus group interviews with a small group of six boys and semi-structured interviews with their two teachers. The data were collected from six boys and their three teachers in the same years and over the same time periods as the data from Somerview School. To reiterate, although the number of boys and teachers I interviewed was small, my findings from Estateside have shown that the boys' feelings about writing were strongly influenced by the climate created by their individual classroom teachers and their approach to teaching writing. Most importantly, my findings have raised the issues of teacher's ability to see children as individuals, rather than through the lens of their gender and their responsiveness to recognizing and addressing the issues boys' face in their literacy learning in the classroom, most significantly for the Estateside boys, their strong sense of inequity.

Context of the school

Once again, background details of Estateside School are given in the Methodology Chapter of this thesis in the context of the rationale for my selection of the school. Again, I provide here a summary of the school context, details of the management in the school and the school approach to teaching literacy at KS2.

The school is a single form entry school, set in an economically disadvantaged area on the edge of a large low cost public housing estate. The proportion of pupils, 33.5% who speak a first language other than English is higher than the National average of 13.4%. The Headteacher has a long association with the school and served as Deputy Headteacher for more than 10 years, followed by a period as acting Headteacher before being appointed the permanent Headteacher in 2005. In December 2005 Ofsted

inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the school to be Grade 3 (satisfactory). The Literacy Co-ordinator, also the Y6 teacher, and since 2009, the Deputy Headteacher, is an experienced teacher and subject leader and has worked as an advisory teacher to support the Literacy Leader and staff in Brooktown School. He has also contributed to a local authority action research project aimed at raising boys' achievement in literacy.

Approach to teaching literacy

I summarise here information relating to the teaching and learning of literacy. As I was unable to gain access to the school literacy policy, I have compiled this summary from publicly available information on the school web site. The school provides a curriculum that is topic based and built around termly themes and covers all the National Curriculum Programmes of Study. The children undertake research, learn presentation skills and use creative media such as drama and art. The core skills of literacy are taught within the Literacy Hour, as recommended by the National Literacy Strategy, but links are also made to the topics children are studying, in order to help the children make sense of their learning. Children are encouraged to assess their own learning and to identify features such as interesting beginnings of sentences, imaginative ideas, powerful words, complex sentences, full stops and capital letters. Daily reading to be done at home is the main form of homework, but children may be given a piece of research, spellings or phonics. Families are encouraged to support their child in homework and other opportunities for home learning. There is a strong commitment to ICT and a belief that every child should have equality in access to digital media. In addition all Years 4, 5 and 6 pupils have access to personal hand-held-computers (Q1s) for use in the classroom and at home. In literacy the boys used their Q1s for word processing, accessing the Internet, e-mail, and the school's managed learning environment (Fronter).

Focus group interviews with the Estateside boys and semi-structured interviews with their teachers

The purpose of the focus group interviews was to gain a deeper insight into how the boys felt about writing in their school classrooms. The Headteacher selected six boys to take part in the interviews and the first and subsequent interviews consisted of the same six boys. As in Somerview, the boys knew each other well, and their group interaction, particularly on issues they felt strongly about, such as gender, provided me with a rich source of data with which to better understand their individual perspectives, as literacy learners in their school. However, there were issues in phase 1 of the study as a result of the location of the room in which I interviewed the boys, where a football match disrupted the boys' concentration towards the end of the interview, resulting in the boys giving very short answers to the last group of questions, because they wanted to go outside to play football. In order not to upset them, I accepted their short answers and endeavoured to speedily bring the interview to a close. My request for a quieter room in future was granted, and a small room at the back of the school, not linked to the playground, was set aside for future interviews. In order to protect the boys' anonymity I have given them the pseudonyms of: Jack, Leo, Cal, Ian, Tate and Kelvin. A fuller discussion of the focus group interviews is given in the Methodology Chapter 3 of this thesis.

To re-iterate, the purpose of the semi-structured interviews with the teachers was to access the teachers' perspective on the teaching and learning of writing in their school classroom. As explained previously, I was unable to record the interviews in phase 1 of the study because the teacher was overly concerned about administrative aspects of the study, such as who would introduce it to the children, and also said she was only available for 10 minutes rather than the half an hour we agreed for the interview. Nevertheless, I did make copious notes both during and after the interview. In order to protect the teachers' anonymity I have referred to them by their Year group, Y4, Y5 or Y6 teacher and the phase in which they taught the children, although the same teacher taught the class in Y4 and Y5. Additionally, in Y6, the class was taught for four days a week by the Y6 teacher, the main class teacher and one day a week by a part-time teacher, the latter of whom was not interviewed for this study. A fuller discussion of

the semi-structured interviews with the teachers is given in the Methodology Chapter 3 of this thesis.

Summary of findings from analysis of focus group interviews with Estateside boys and semi-structured interviews with their teachers

I undertook my analysis of the data from my interviews with the boys and their teachers in the same way as I did with the data from Somerview, with the aim of seeking explanations for the boys' attitude to writing and changes in their attitude over time. My analysis of the data revealed the same seven categories as emerged in my analysis of the data from Somerview and these were: attitude to literacy and writing; difficulties with writing; differential performance; fairness; parental support; barriers to learning and motivation. I provide a summary of my findings from this analysis, matched against these categories, as shown in the table below. As can be seen, I have merged phases 1 and 2 as the same teacher taught the class and many of the issues were the same in these phases. In phase 3, although I did not interview the part-time teacher who taught the class, in their interviews with me the boys frequently commented on the different approaches this teacher had, in contrast to their main class teacher, and I have therefore referred to these teachers separately, as the main teacher and the part-time teacher, as shown in the table below:

Table 5.1 Summary of findings from analysis of focus group interviews with the Estateside boys and semi-structured interviews with their teachers								
Categories	Phase	Jack	Leo	Cal	Ian	Tate	Kelvin	Teachers
Attitude to literacy & writing	1&2	With the exception of Jack who liked writing, the other boys disliked writing. All boys preferred subjects that required the least amount of literacy.						Classroom climate where boys had a strong sense of inequity & found it difficult to concentrate on their writing. Technical/themed approach to teaching writing.
	3	Slightly more positive attitude towards						Classroom climate

		writing, with Jack, Cal & Kelvin indicating they liked writing in particular genres and Jack valued the constructive feedback his main Y6 teacher gave the boys on their writing. As phase 1&2 for attitude to literacy.	where the boys had a slightly stronger sense of equity, but this was undermined by their part-time teacher. Genre focus for teaching writing.
Difficulties with writing	1&2	With the exception of Cal in phase 2, all the other boys commented on difficulties with the technical aspects of writing, such as aching hands, punctuation and spelling and had difficulty with sustaining their writing, but use of the Q1s alleviated their anxiety about handwriting.	Technical/themed approach to teaching writing.
	3	Boys less concerned with the technical aspects of writing, more able to see the purpose of their writing, but continued to have difficulties in sustaining their writing.	Genre focus for teaching writing. Main Y6 teacher blamed other teachers for not preparing the boys to write in a wide range of genres.
Differential performance	1&2	In phase 1, with the exception of Cal, the other boys thought girls and boys performed equally in school subjects. In phase 2, without exception the boys thought that the girls outperformed boys in their school.	Gendered perceptions of boys in literacy, with boys less able to include detail in their writing, but little or no intervention to specifically help the boys improve.
	3	As phase 2 above.	Main Y6 teacher had gendered perceptions of boys in literacy, with boys seen as less able writers than the girls.
Fairness	1&2	Without exception the boys thought they were disciplined unfairly by their class	Teacher viewed children as gendered groups

		teacher.	rather than individuals and was unaware of the boys' strong feelings of inequity and the impact this had on their learning.
	3	As phase 2 above, but the boys only commented on unfairness in relation to the part-time teacher who taught the class for one day a week and the staff who supervised them in the playground.	Main Y6 teacher as above.
Parental support	1&2	With the exception of Jack in phase 1 who received help at home from his mum, none of the other boys mentioned help from their families at home.	No strategies to engage boys' families in their literacy learning at home.
	3	With the exception of Cal, all the other boys mentioned literacy support from their families at home.	Main Y6 teacher intervened to engage families in reading with their children, but blamed children's families for the boys' lack reading at home.
Barriers to learning	1&2	Jack, Leo, Ian and Kelvin mentioned misbehaviour of others in phase 1, and all mentioned chatting of other children working together on group tables as a distraction in phases 1 and 2.	Teacher aware of distractions but dealt with the symptoms not the cause.
	3	Without exception boys mentioned distractions as a result of the increasing and worsening conflicts between the boys and girls in this phase.	Main teacher as above
Motivation	1&2	All the boys were more motivated to write when using their Q1s that gave them a sense of autonomy over their writing. Although Cal, Kelvin & Tate mentioned informal help from classmates in phase 1,	Few strategies other than the Q1s to give the boys autonomy over their writing.

		<p>none of the boys mentioned this in phase 2, nor did they mention more formalized peer partner writing.</p> <p>In phase 2, Jack, Leo, Kelvin & Tate said they liked being able to choose, but Leo said they rarely got the opportunity to do this.</p>	
	3	<p>As above, but Leo and Tate did not mention their use of their Q1s; only Cal mentioned writing with his peers, and none of the boys mentioned choice.</p>	<p>Main Y6 teacher encouraged use of Q1s for word processing final drafts.</p> <p>Some use of peer partners.</p>

As these categories emerged in relation to the boys' feelings about their school, classroom, literacy and writing and in order to best explain my findings in this Chapter, I have embedded the eight categories under these same headings I used for Somerview, as shown below:

The Estateside boys' feelings about school

School support for literacy & fairness

Home & school support for literacy

The Estateside boys' feelings about the classroom

Barriers to learning & fairness

Perceptions of fairness in relation to gender

Autonomy & motivation

The Estateside boys' feelings about literacy

Gendered preferences for school subjects

Beliefs about differential performance

The Estateside boys' feelings about writing

Difficulties with the technical aspects of writing

Choice & genre

Stamina & longer writing tasks

I now turn to a discussion of the boys' feelings about school.

The Estateside boys' feelings about school

Boys were asked the question "Do you like school?" Their responses are summarised below:

Table 5.2 The Estateside boys' feelings about school						
	Jack	Leo	Cal	Ian	Kelvin	Tate
phase 1	Depends on subject	Yes	Yes	Depends on subject	Depends on subject	Depends on subject
phase 2	Boredom	Boredom	More settled	More settled	Better understanding	Better understanding
phase 3	Best year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

As can be seen from the table above, the boys' reactions to this question show that in phase 1, apart from Leo and Cal who were positive about school, the other boys said it depended on the subject they were learning. In phase 2, although Jack and Leo said they were bored, the others were feeling more settled at school. By contrast, in phase 3 all the boys said they had enjoyed their year, however, this masked the great dissatisfaction they displayed in regard to the way they were treated in their school in this phase, and this is discussed later in this Chapter. Some typical comments made by the boys in the three phases are illustrated below:

"I don't like school because of when we write stories and I like school because of playtime." (Ian, phase 1)

"The work is getting a bit harder but I'm starting to learn it more and more." (Tate, phase 2)

“I think it’s been the best year apart from Reception because we’ve been doing SATs so it’s a different kind of learning and we’ve got more responsibility and things like that.” (Jack, phase 3)

In phase 1 four of the boys linked their feelings about school to their preferences or dislike of certain school subjects, which is discussed more fully later in this Chapter. In phase 2, apart from Jack and Leo who indicated they were bored, the other boys said they were feeling better about school, mainly because they felt they were beginning to make sense of their schoolwork, but this conflicted with comments they made in relation to their literacy learning and this is discussed more fully later in this Chapter. By contrast, in Y6, the boys were unequivocally positive in their response to this question. However, although Jack indicated that he had enjoyed the change in the way they had been working in preparation for their SATs tests and Cal and Kelvin said they had been having more fun since their SATs, all the boys in this phase commented throughout their interview on their more positive feelings about how they were taught in this phase by their Y6 teacher, and this is discussed more fully later in this Chapter.

School support for literacy & fairness

Boys were asked the question “Is there something the school could do to help you with your writing?” The boys’ responses are shown below:

Table 5.3 The Estateside boys’ perceptions of how the school could help them with literacy						
	Jack	Leo	Cal	Ian	Kelvin	Tate
phase 1	Own table	Tables	Own table	Tables	Tables	Own table
phase 2	Tables; earplugs; separate playground; trust us	Tables; helpers; fairness	Tables & earplugs & trust us	Tables & trust us	Tables & fairness	Own table Fairness
phase 3	More fun & fairness	Be more fair	No	No	No	No

The data in the table in phases 1 and 2 show all the boys were concerned about the physical environment in the school and their proximity to each other and in phase 2 they were all concerned with the way they were treated by the teachers and staff who supervised them in the playground, which they perceived to be unfair and three boys raised the issue of trust. Although in phase 3, the boys indicated they were happier in school, Jack and Leo continued to raise issues about fairness. Some typical comments made by the boys in phases 1 and 2 are illustrated below:

“... more tables ... and we could sit on our own most often, like when we did tests ... and when we was in Y3 our teacher used to put us so we couldn't see each other and keep talking” (Leo, phase 1)

“Get bigger classrooms and tables so that we can have like two or three on a table and also give us earplugs and thick ones so we don't hear anybody else... and they should be watching over all of us more than just the boys and they should treat us fairly and I think they should have like small areas in the playground cos like say the boys just want to be away from the girls for a certain amount of time...” (Jack, phase 2)

In phases 1 and 2 the boys thought their physical proximity to each other in the classroom and playground was the cause of conflict between children and in phase 2 Jack commented that he felt the boys and girls were not trusted or treated fairly, an issue which all the boys raised frequently in my interviews with them, and this is discussed more fully later in this Chapter. However, Jack and Cal's comments about earplugs in phase 2 suggests the situation worsened in this phase. In phase 3, the boys were feeling more positive about school, as illustrated in Cal's comments below:

“No, because they do a for us now like to support us and everything and there's not much else they can do really.” (Cal, phase 3)

Cal's comment was typical of the comments made by the boys in this phase, but these positive comments related entirely to improvements in the classroom climate created by their main Y6 teacher, but this was not the case in relation to the part time teacher who the boys' thought treated them unfairly. As a result, the boys' continued to have a strong sense of inequity in Y6 and this presented a barrier to their ability to concentrate on their writing, an issue I discuss in more detail later in this Chapter. Furthermore, in

my interviews with the Y5 and Y6 class teachers they showed no awareness of the feelings the boys had about their treatment in the school, and made comments such as “I don’t think so ... they might prove me wrong ... ” (Y5 teacher, phase 2) and “... I don’t know that much, I certainly believe that much anyway...” (Y6 teacher, phase 3). It is clear that the teachers were unsure of how the boys felt in school and had not consulted with them to find out whether there were any barriers to their learning. Jack’s frustration with the lack of response to the issues of fairness and trust in the differential way he perceived girls and boys were treated are illustrated in his comments below:

“... I think we should like split sort of thing so the girls can be on one side and the boys could be on the other like a debate kind of. I think that’s a good idea though because if the girls and boys, because quite often we always have debates between the whole class between the girls and the boys and so I think we should set it into an actual debate into the classroom so we can sort out our problems.” (Jack, phase 3)

In his comment, Jack offers a way forward for the school staff to resolve the issues the boys have with their relationships with the girls. However, for this to happen the teachers would first need to be aware that the issue exists, by consulting with the pupils about the difficulties they face through approaches such as the pupil voice (Rudduck & Flutter 2000; MacBeath et al, 2003).

Home & school support for literacy

Boys were asked the question “Do you write at home?” and “Is there anyone who helps you with your writing?” Their responses are summarised below:

Table 5.4 The support the Estateside boys received in their homes and school for their literacy learning						
	Jack	Leo	Cal	Ian	Kelvin	Tate
phase 1	Stories in Y3; mum	Lists; librarian & classmates	Lists; classmates	Lists; Classmate	Pictures; teachers & classmates	Pictures; classmate
phase 2	Texting; independent	E-mail & games; teaching assistant	E-mail & games; teaching assistant & teacher	E-mail & games; teaching assistant	E-mail & games; no-one	E-mail & games; teaching assistant
phase 3	Texting; mum & teacher	Homework; brother	E-mails; teacher & teaching assistant	Diary; dad & teacher	E-mails; brother	Homework; dad & teaching assistant

The data in the table above shows that with the exception of Jack in phase 1, who said he wrote stories at home when he was in Y3, and Ian who wrote a diary, in all three phases none of the boys said they wrote at home for anything other than functional purposes. Further, with the exception of Jack in phase 1, none of the other boys mentioned help from their families in either phases 1 or 2, whereas in phase 3, with the exception of Cal, all the other boys mentioned help with their literacy from family members at home.

Some comments from the boys illustrating what they wrote at home are shown below:

“When I was little I really used to like stories and um, and I like write some stories but I haven’t written one since I was 7 in Y3...” (Jack, phase 1)

“I don’t write much at home at all ... e-mail or games cos I get to talk to my friends” (Kelvin, phase 2)

“I sometimes write, um like in my diary [*interrupted by ohs, giggles and sneezes from the other boys*], and I send e-mails.” (Ian, Estateside, phase 2)

Jack and Kelvin's comments indicate that they rarely wrote at home, other than for functional purposes, such as to communicate with their friends via e-mail and texting. When Ian revealed in phase 3 that he liked to write a diary at home, the other boys greeted this comment with derision, indicating that reflective writing was not a form of writing they thought was appropriate for boys to engage in at home. As a result of their reaction to his comment, Ian also quickly added that he liked to write e-mails as well. These findings concur with the findings of Fishbein & Ajzen (1975) that individuals are subject to normative pressures (that people think that they should or should not behave in a certain way) and with Epstein (1998) that male peer groups used verbal abuse to reinforce their definition of masculinity. I would suggest, therefore, that the boys' stated preferences were constrained, to a certain extent, by their desire to fit in with the dominant culture of masculinity.

Although, with the exception of Jack in phase 1, the boys did not mention literacy support from their families at home, there was an increase in the number of boys who mentioned support from families when they were in Y6, and an explanation for this is provided in their Y6 teacher's comments below:

You know, if 'The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe' isn't relative for certain children we need to research that and find what is. So that's the challenge, um, and we [*the Headteacher and I*] were discussing, you know, making sure that every Y6 child has a library ticket ... the kids were taking home books and that particular set of guided reading books, I mean we've only got two left now within the school, you know, some never came back ... knowing where to put that kinda support in at home as well ... the children really have to buy in ... " (Y6 teacher, phase 3)

The Y6 teacher's comments indicate that he was unsure of the kind of support the school needed to provide to encourage families to read at home with their children and that when he did intervene to encourage his class to read at home, this was less successful than he expected it to be. Nevertheless, the increase in the number of boys who mentioned help from their families in this phase, in contrast to phases 1 and 2, indicate that this intervention did contribute to encouraging the families to get involved with their children's literacy learning. An explanation for the lack of action on the part

of the teacher to persist with his intervention was provided in a comment he made about the children's families, as illustrated below:

“ ... I also feel that it's part of the kind of social ... and cultural, whether or not, the boys say for example, their role models, positive role models were actually writers or readers, ... (Y6 teacher, phase 3)

The Y6 teacher's comments indicate that he believes boys will read and write if they have a particular social and cultural background, suggesting that children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to have positive role models. As the majority of the children from Estateside are drawn from families of disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, this comment implies that the teacher is judging the children based on their family background and blaming the children's families for their difficulties with reading and writing, rather than the lack of a school policy on encouraging families to engage with children's literacy learning at home. This finding echoes the findings of Heath (1982) that children from different communities had different literacy experiences in their homes and, where these conflicted, it was more difficult for children to make progress, and that teachers often misjudged these children's literacy abilities (Kress, 1994; Gipps, 1999; Paechter, 2007). Given the importance of children's reading in their development as writers (Barrs & Cork, 2001) and the importance of parental involvement programs to encourage children to read (Jeynes, 2005; Dearing, et al, 2006), particularly children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds (Dearing, et al 2006), I would suggest that the lack of early intervention by the school has contributed to their lack of engagement with reading at home with their families, evident in phases 1 and 2 of this study.

In summary, with the exception of Jack and Cal, who said they were bored in phase 2, the boys' initial reactions were more positive about school in phases 2 and 3 than they were in phase 1, but this masked their dissatisfaction with other aspects of their schooling. In particular, the boys felt they did not have enough space in the classroom or playground and their close proximity to other children contributed to increasing conflicts, particular with the girls. These issues persisted across the phases, as a result of a lack of teacher consultation with the boys to find out the issues they faced.

Further, although the boys' main Y6 teacher made some provision for the children in his class to read at home with their families in Y6, his stereotypical beliefs that children from disadvantaged families were less likely to read in their homes, along with his and the Headteachers dilemma over how to make provision for all the children in the school, contributed, with the exception of Jack, to the boys' families lack of engagement with their literacy learning as they progressed through the school.

The Estateside boys' feelings about the classroom

The boys' feelings about the classroom emerged in their answers to questions about their school, as discussed earlier in this Chapter, and in relation to questions I asked them relating to what hampered their learning, how they were treated by their teachers and what things made it easier for them to write. I begin with what they thought hampered their learning.

Barriers to learning & fairness

Boys were asked the question "Is there anything that stops you from learning?" Their responses are summarised below:

Table 5.5 Barriers to learning for the Estateside boys in their classroom						
	Jack	Leo	Cal	Ian	Kelvin	Tate
phase 1	Chatting; unfairness; misbehaviour	Chatting; misbehaviour	Chatting;	Chatting; misbehaviour	Chatting; misbehaviour	Chatting
phase 2	Chatting	Chatting; unfairness	Chatting	Chatting	Chatting	Chatting
phase 3	Chatting; unfairness	Chatting; unfairness	Chatting; unfairness	Chatting unfairness	Chatting; unfairness	Chatting unfairness

As can be seen from the data in the table above, the main cause of distraction in all three phases, was chatting on group tables and the boys' perceptions of unfairness in the way they were disciplined by their teachers. Typical comments made by the boys are shown below:

“Three things that stop me from me learning. One is sometimes [*other children*] are being really annoying sometimes, um, um, I get told off for stuff I don't, I haven't been doing, and then it makes me a bit upset and I can't focus on my learning. And, another one is that sometimes the tables I'm on when I'm just trying to do me work, sometimes, the tables I'm on are talking and it starts getting in my head and I start talking as well.” (Jack, phase 1)

“Say I was talking to someone about ... and chat about something .. I wouldn't be able to stop.” (Kelvin, phase 2)

“When others are talking and when you get told off even when you aren't talking... that frustrates us” (Cal, phase 3)

“What gets on my nerves is when sometimes it's boys, but some of the times it's the girls... teachers, like, say, um, say, um, can you move please ... but really they [*the girls*] have been talking but we haven't and they just try and get out of it ...” (Jack, phase 3)

Jack's comment indicates he is struggling to concentrate on his work when other children misbehave or chat to each other and although he admits he is sometimes drawn into the chatting, he feels that he is often disciplined for things he has not done, which indicate the children are being disciplined as a group rather than individuals. Kelvin echoes Jack's comment about being drawn into chatting with others working on the same table and Cal again, comments on how frustrated he feels when the group are disciplined and he has not been talking and Jack is unhappy when he feels boys are disciplined more harshly than girls. The boys' teachers were aware that the children distracted each other and the way they disciplined the children is illustrated in their comments below:

“... if they're off task some of them will just retreat within themselves – some of them will start distracting other children and talking to others ... it's sort of first of all gentle encouragement 'come on let's get on with it' and then if somebody hasn't produced enough work because they've just spent the lesson playing then by default their playtime becomes their work time but it's not often that I use that sanction.” (Y5 teacher, phase 2)

“... chatting, time wasting, for example, Um, just give them milestones basically, for example ... because they are older children, my expectation would be that we have got quite a strict deadline, which is again good teaching because it's teaching them to take responsibility... on the very rare occasion I've asked children to come in and they might sit outside my office over lunch time ... “ (Y6 teacher, phase 3)

These comments indicate there were two tiers to the teachers' discipline, with initial encouragement or milestones followed by harsher sanctions, such as loss of playtime. However, neither of the teachers' comments indicated that they viewed the children as individuals in the first tier of their discipline, and they were unaware that the boys' felt they were disciplined unjustly.

Perceptions of fairness in relation to gender

Boys were asked the question “Do you think teachers treat boys and girls the same?” However, in phase 2 the boys raised the issue of differential treatment between boys and girls before I asked the question and in phase 3, they made extensive comments about this issue. Their responses are summarised in the table below:

Table 5.6 The Estateside boys' perceptions of the way they were treated by their teachers						
	Jack	Leo	Cal	Ian	Kelvin	Tate
phase 1	Girls favoured	Girls favoured	Girls favoured	Girls favoured	Girls favoured	Girls favoured
phase 2	Girls favoured	Girls favoured	Girls favoured	Girls favoured	Girls favoured	Girls favoured
phase 3	Girls favoured	Girls favoured	Girls favoured	Girls favoured	Girls favoured	Girls favoured

As can be seen from the data in the table above, the boys unequivocally felt that the girls were treated better than they were. The reasons they gave for this are evident in their comments shown below:

"I think boys and girls aren't treated the same because some girls um don't get told off most often and boys get told off most often ..." (Leo, phase 1)

"... [*boys are treated more harshly because*] teachers are more used to boys doing stuff they're not meant to" (Jack, phase 1)

In phase 1, Leo's comment was typical of the comments made by the boys that they felt they were disciplined more often and, in their view, more harshly than the girls. While agreeing with the others that teachers treated boys less fairly, Jack's comment shows that, in his view, the boys were partly to blame for the harsher treatment because they behaved less well than the girls in the classroom. Although all the boys, again in phase 2, commented on differential treatment, Ian, Jack and Cal thought the reason for this related to the gender of the teacher, as illustrated in Ian's comments below:

"Mr M he doesn't really tell us off it's only the girl teachers because like if one of the girls pushed us ... if we went to Mr M he would say "are you telling the truth?" and he would get to the bottom of it..." (Ian, phase 2)

"[*the reason female teachers treat boys less fairly*] "... they do it because ... female teachers had brothers cos even Ms M [*the boys Y4/Y5 teacher*] admitted that I think they got a bit on her nerves ...". (Jack, phase 2)

Ian's comment shows he thinks that male teachers were fairer to boys because they were more likely to investigate the issue the boys raised thoroughly whereas female teachers just blamed the boys. Although the boys felt that they would benefit from being taught by a male teacher, Carrington et al (2008) found no evidence that male teachers enhanced the performance of boys and female teachers enhanced the performance of girls. However, in phase 3, where the boys were taught by both male and female teachers, they did not mention the gender of the teacher as an issue, rather they identified teachers who they perceived to be fair because they listened to boys and those that were not, as Jack's comment below illustrates:

“Mr L [*our main Y6 teacher*], Mr G [*the Headteacher*] and some other teachers like Mrs L [*teaching assistant*] they always manage to sort it out but there are some teachers who don't ... that teacher we have on Wednesdays, we tell her the girls have caused trouble and she tells us off instead ..., but sometimes a lot of the time we're just upset about something that happened over playtime because it didn't get sorted out” (Jack, phase 3)

Jack's comments indicate that his main Y6 teacher, who was also the deputy headteacher and literacy leader, the Headteacher and the class teaching assistant were prepared to take seriously the issues the boys raised and to investigate these, but the part-time teacher they had for one day a week on a Wednesday and the staff who supervised them in the playground did not. However, the Y6 teacher was a very experienced teacher and, as the Y6 teacher said during his interview with me he worked with “... a very highly competent teaching assistant ...”. These findings chime with the findings of Carrington, et al (2008) that Y6 children were more likely to be taught by male teachers and the most able male and female teachers in the school. However, the inconsistency in the school approach to dealing with relationship issues between boys and girls meant that the difficulties continued and worsened, and Cal's comment below was typical of comments made by the boys in this phase:

“Because like, when the boys like and the girls both do something wrong, like the same thing, but the girls get in less trouble. ... say one of the girls had hit us ... we go to miss ... the girls make up a story saying we hit them first and then we get in trouble ... so it ends up frustrating the boys so they do less work” (Cal, phase 3)

Cal's comments indicated that the girls had become more violent and the frustration he felt as a result of what he perceived to be unfair treatment, distracted him from his work. The escalating violence was also evident in comments made by other boys, but also worrying was their growing acceptance of the situation. Jack said “... a girl ... started poking me in the face ... and one girl stabbed one of the boys with a pencil ... so he walked off because he was bleeding, he didn't tell miss or nothing ...”, Kelvin said “a girl ... she dragged one of the boys onto the floor and started kicking him”, Cal said “one of the girls yesterday, she had this ink and she threw it ... and when she said you deserve it I just carried on with my work”. The boys had two particularly

prolonged interactions in relation to the issue of their relationships with the girls, which formed a compelling story of their daily experiences in their school, revealing strong consensus of views on the reasons the problems existed (a fuller transcription and analysis of this can be found in Appendix 12 of this thesis). The boys' comments not only reflect a deterioration in the relationship between the Y6 boys and the girls, but they also reflect an increase in what Jackson called girls 'laddish' behaviour (Jackson C., 2006) and, to a certain extent this behaviour, was tolerated by some staff, something Jackson attributed to female teachers' celebration of an increased confidence and assertiveness amongst girls, whereas Jones & Myhill (2004) suggested that the persistence of stereotypical identities, such as the 'compliant girl' contributed to the poor behaviour of girls going unnoticed by teachers.

Although I asked the teachers about the kinds of behaviour children adopted when they were not getting on with their work and the way they were disciplined, the teachers made no comments about behavioural issues, as their comments below show:

“ ... although there are more girls in the class than boys ... maybe the boys are a little more negative [*about writing*] than the girls ... there aren't any real behaviour issues ...” (Y5 teacher, phase 2)

“ ... this class is pretty responsive and they are a relatively able writing class ...” (Y6 teacher, phase 3)

The Y5 teacher's comment indicates she thinks the boys may be more negative than the girls because they were in the minority, but the difference was small with 17 girls and 13 boys. But, neither of the teachers commented on differences in behaviour, as the boys had done, and this could be because they did not want to admit to having behavioural difficulties in their classroom or that, as others have suggested went unnoticed or was tolerated by teachers (Jones & Myhill, 2004; Jackson, C., 2006).

Autonomy & motivation

Boys were asked the question “What sort of things make it easy to write?” The boys talked about their Q1s for writing, help from their peers and choice in writing, as summarised below.

Table 5.7 Teaching strategies that motivated the Estateside boys to write						
	Jack	Leo	Cal	Ian	Kelvin	Tate
phase 1	Q1; Choice	Q1	Q1; classmates	Q1	Q1; classmates	Q1; classmates
phase 2	Q1; choice	Q1; choice	Q1	Q1	Q1; choice	Q1; Choice
phase 3	Q1		Q1; classmates	Q1	Q1	

As can be seen from the data in the table above, with the exception of Leo and Tate in phase 3, all the boys mentioned their use of Q1s as helpful in the process of writing in all three phases of this study, with fewer boys mentioning help from their classmates or choice over writing activities.

With regard to computers, as outlined at the beginning of this Chapter, this cohort of boys had access to Q1s, to use at home and at school, throughout their time in Y4, Y5 and Y6, and, as their comments here show, they became increasingly familiar with their use. In phase 1 all the boys commented that they liked using their Q1s because they suffered from aching hands when they were writing by hand but not when they were typing. Jack's comment below was typical of the comments made by the boys in phase 1:

“ ... It's just easier to write on the Q1s and sometimes when I'm writing and my hands, my hand just, my hand starts aching and my mind goes blank and I can't think of anything and I really get frustrated ...” (Jack, phase 1)

Jack's comment indicated that when he was writing his hand ached and this interfered with his concentration but this did not happen when he was using his Q1. Graves

(1983) argued that handwriting difficulties could be avoided by correct placement of the writing paper, arm and wrist placement and pencil grip. However, in phases 2 and 3 of this study, none of the boys mentioned difficulties with aching hands and a reason for this was evident in comments made by their Y5 teacher, as shown below:

“The Q1s have taken away their anxiety about writing, handwriting and spelling ... and the children’s typing speeds have improved through practice.” (Y5 teacher, phase 2)

This comment indicated that the children were less anxious about handwriting and spelling as a result of regularly using their Q1s for writing. Other reasons the boys liked using the Q1s are illustrated in Ian and Kelvin’s comments below:

“I think it’s been better writing and typing on our Q1s cos sometimes we have to um plan the story and then write the story and I think it’s more longer. (Ian, phase 2)

Well before we had to waste time going down to the computer suite and we’d waste five minutes lining up and like now we just have to get them and it’s like one minute. (Kelvin, phase 2)

Ian’s comment indicates he has been using his Q1 for writing and that this takes less time than when he handwrites a story and Kelvin cites the benefits of having his own personal access to the device. However, in phase 3 the boys talked less about their use of their Q1s, and I would suggest the reason for this is either that prolonged use meant they were no longer a novelty, or a more likely explanation, is that the boys were using them less because their teacher was preparing them for their tests which required them to handwrite and this is discussed more fully later in this Chapter. Although my findings agree with those who argued that computers motivate children to write (Cox, 1997; Lewis et al, 1999; Goldberg, 2003; Passey, et al, 2004), my findings have also shown that extensive personal access to computers has alleviated their anxiety about their aching hands and their handwriting and enabled them to concentrate on the content of their writing.

With regard to help from peers, although Cal, Kelvin and Tate said they sometimes received help from their classmates in phase 1, Jack said he would prefer to be able to work with his partner only, as illustrated in their comments below:

“Um, the people who help me is, when I’m stuck on a question, T.. or M.. or N.. would like say, do you need help, like and I would say Yes, and then they would start you off with your sentence ... If Miss wants us to do learning and we’re allowed to sit on a table, yeh, any table ...” (Cal, phase 1)

“...I agree with Cal, I think we should ask the teacher to not like take away the tables apart completely, but just split them up a bit so we move next to our partner only.” (Jack, phase 1)

Cal and Jack’s comments indicate that they knew which classmates they could work with and those they could not, but they were not allowed by their teacher to choose where to sit. As discussed earlier in this Chapter, the boys thought the reasons for this was that their teachers did not trust them. However, other reasons for the lack of peer partner writing were evident in comments made by the boys’ Y5 teacher:

“... what I do for some of the children for self-esteem is send them to other teachers when they’ve done something that I can see that they should be really proud of, ... so the literacy co-ordinator is a very good one to send the children to because you can see they come back a bit more puffed up ready, ‘I can write, I want to do this again’, so the peer-marking is something we are working on. (Y5 teacher, phase 2)

The Y5 teacher’s comment that she perceives peer marking to be something that takes place with one of her peers and the children rather than pairing up the children together to undertake this activity. However, the Y6 teacher did indicate that he encouraged the children to talk about their writing with their own peers, as illustrated in his comments below:

“... the children, they require support before they write, you know, they want to talk to partners they want to start sentences, you know, what they don’t want and what they should have in fairness, they shouldn’t be expected to go straight in ...” (Y6 teacher, phase 3)

Although the Y6 teacher's comments indicated he was aware of the benefits of children talking with their partners about their writing before they write, with the exception of Cal in this phase, none of the other boys mentioned writing with their peer partners. However, I would suggest another explanation for the lack of peer partner writing is likely to relate to the unresolved relationship issues between the boys and the girls. In this climate, the children would have been less used to working co-operatively together in their classroom and were less likely to have been aware of the ground rules for effective co-operation with their peers, something Mercer (2000) argued was essential if children were to engage effectively in peer talk.

With regard to choice, in phase 1 Jack said he liked choosing the order in which he did his writing tasks and in phase 2, Leo said he liked being able to choose a topic for writing, Jack that he liked choosing his own genre and Kelvin indicated he was more motivated when he could choose what to write. However, Leo's comment indicates the boys rarely got the opportunity to choose:

“And most of the time the teachers choose what we have to write and one day it would be fun for us choose what we wanna write.” (Leo, phase 2)

Leo indicated that he sometimes had the opportunity to choose but this did not happen often and this concurred with the interviews I had with the boys' teachers where neither the Y5 nor the Y6 teacher commented on choice as a teaching approach they used in their classroom.

In summary, my findings have shown that the difficulties children had in working together on large group tables and the difficulties the boys had in their relationships with the girls were not addressed, and this caused a major barrier to the boys' ability to concentrate on their writing in the Estateside classroom. This was further exacerbated by the boys' perception that when they were working together on group tables they were not disciplined fairly by their teachers and that their teachers tended, with the exception of the Y6 teacher and a small number of staff in Y6, not to take seriously the conflicts with the girls that the boys reported. As a result, the boys' relationship with the girls deteriorated and the conflicts between them became more violent, as Jack,

Kelvin and Cal graphically illustrated. Although all the Estateside boys benefited from their consistent use of their Q1s, such as the reduction in the anxiety they felt about handwriting and the ability to focus on the content of their writing and gave them greater autonomy over their writing; the limited choice they had over where to sit or who to sit with and the unresolved issues with the girls, along with their teachers' lack of action to develop peer partner writing, restricted the boys' ability to become more autonomous in their writing.

The Estateside boys' feelings about literacy

Gendered preferences for school subjects

Boys were asked the question "What do you like to do best at school?" Their responses are summarised below:

Table 5.8 The Estateside boys' preferred school subjects						
	Jack	Leo	Cal	Ian	Kelvin	Tate
phase 1	Clubs, PE, writing on Q1s	PE, Maths, word games on Q1s	Maths, literacy	PE, free time	Maths, writing on Q1s	Art, PE, Maths, word games on Q1s
phase 2	Free time on Q1s, playtime	Maths	Playtime	PE	Free time on Q1s, playtime	Free time on Q1s, playtime
phase 3	PE	Art	Maths	PE	PE	Maths

The data in the table above shows, that, with the exception of Cal in phase 1, none of the boys mentioned literacy as a preferred subject, rather, across the three phases their preferences were for subjects that required the least amount of literacy and in phase 2, the boys only mentioned two school subjects. However, in phases 1 and 2 of this study, many of the boys included their use of their Q1s as an activity they enjoyed. Some typical comments the boys made in relation their feelings about school subjects, are illustrated below:

“My favourite things are going on the Q1s and Fronter to do the learning and writing stickies” (Kelvin, phase 1)

“I like free time on the Q1s and playtime.” (Tate, phase 2)

Kelvin and Tate's comments were typical of the comments made by the boys in phases 1 and 2, in that they mainly responded to their feelings about school subjects by talking about their feelings about using their Q1s to engage in literacy activities or for what they described as 'free time'. In phase 1 Kelvin commented that he liked using his Q1s to access 'Fronter' (the school managed learning environment) and that he liked writing 'stickies' to communicate with his classmates, Leo and Tate said they liked using their Q1s to play word games and Jack said he liked writing on his Q1. In phase 2 Jack, Kelvin and Tate all said they liked having free time on their Q1s, but they did not say what they were doing. It would seem from their comments that the use of their Q1s as a communicating tool has served to extend the boys' view of literacy as a traditional school subject, a subject that Merchant (2005) suggested was heavily focused on basic skills and print based text. Further, although there has been negative media coverage about the impact of children's use of informal language for sending e-mails and text messages, on their writing in school (Thurlow, 2006), a study conducted by Plester et al (2008) concluded that there was no evidence that knowledge and use of informal language for sending e-mails and text messages had any negative association with pre-teen children's written language competence. The Y4/Y5 class teacher commented on how the boys used their Q1s for writing as shown below:

“...children are more motivated to get their writing done ... they can do quick discussions with the MLE Fronter and they can write blogs ...” (Y5 teacher, phase 2)

The Y5 teacher indicated that the Q1s motivated the boys to write and as well as providing opportunities to talk to each other, they also provided the opportunity to write more extensively, such as blogs. However, the boys did not mention extended writing and predominantly talked about their use of the Q1s for short pieces of writing. However, when they were in Y6 none of the boys mentioned their Q1s in relation to literacy as a school subject and the reason for this was evident in Jack's comment below:

“Every subject has its down part, right. I like writing. On our build up to SATs I liked doing stories for writing, well some of them I didn't like and I absolutely hate comprehension.” (Jack, phase 3)

Jack's comment indicates that the literacy experiences he has had in Y6 have included preparation for the SATs tests and that there are aspects of this he 'likes', such as writing some of the stories and those he 'hates' such as comprehension, but he, like the other boys, did not mention their Q1s in relation to their literacy experiences. However, his teacher did comment, as shown below:

“... I mean those children from Y4 through to Y6 have had their own computers [Q1s]... they especially like to, you know, their final drafts, they like to kind of word process ... (Y6 teacher, phase 3)

Although the teacher has used the Q1s for the children to present their final drafts, he did not mention other uses, and, along with the lack of comments the boys made about their Q1s in this phase, suggests that they were used far less in Y6 than they were in Y4/Y5. Others have argued that there is a need for a wider definition of literacy as a school subject and for the need for literacy pedagogy to include on-screen and print-based reading and writing, (Marsh, 2005; Merchant, 2007; Pahl & Rowsell, 2012), so that children can better understand how to communicate effectively in the new genres that have emerged and that they can 'move more fluidly from their modally complex lives outside school walls to their worlds within school walls' (Pahl & Rowsell, 2012:175). However, my findings have shown that despite the motivational benefits to the boys of using their Q1s, there were fewer opportunities for boys to use these in Y6 as their teacher prepared them for the SATs tests that were exclusively hand written.

Beliefs about differential performance

Boys were asked the question “Do you think boys or girls do better in school or do you think they are about the same?” Their responses are summarised in the table below:

Table 5.9 The Estateside boys' perceptions of girls' and boys' achievement						
	Jack	Leo	Cal	Ian	Kelvin	Tate
phase 1	Equal	Equal	Diff in diff subjects	Equal	Equal	Equal
phase 2	Girls do better	Girls do better	Girls do better	Girls do better	Girls do better	Girls do better
phase 3	Girls do better	Girls do better	Girls do better	Girls do better	Girls do better	Girls do better

The data in the table above shows a distinct shift in the boys' perceptions across the phases, from phase 1, where with the exception of Cal, the boys thought girls and boys did equally well in school subjects, to phases 2 and 3 where all the boys perceived that girls did better than boys in their school. Some typical comments made by the boys in phase 1 are shown below:

“Girls do better than boys because the girls can write faster than the boys.” (Cal, phase 1)

“I thinking they're about the same because some girls are faster at running but some boys are faster at writing.” (Leo, phase 1)

Although Cal's comments indicate he has strongly gendered perceptions about girls' ability in writing, Leo and the other boys thought that children's aptitudes in school particular subjects were not related to their gender. However, in phases 2 and 3, without exception, the boys thought that girls did outperform them in school and consistently explained this in terms of their teacher's bias towards favouring the girls, as illustrated in Jack and Cal's comments below:

“I think sometimes it's equal but sometimes I think that like sometimes I think that um girls do better at school cos they get an easier time and sometimes we get, if we do something we would get in like trouble but if they do something, the girls do something they wouldn't get in trouble. The teacher would just believe them or something like that so they have nothing to worry about the boys are thinking about

the rest of the day and what's happened and getting angry and upset and so they don't do as much work so I think the girls get an easier time." (Jack, phase 2)

"Girls do better because they get in less trouble". (Cal, phase 3)

Jack and Cal's comments indicate they perceived the reason for the boys' lack of progress in literacy, was because the boys received harsher treatment from their teachers, in comparison to the girls, and this distracted the boys from their work.

Although the boys' explanation for their differential performance in comparison to the girls could be a smokescreen for their own inability to settle down to their writing in the classroom, I would suggest that the number of times they raised the issue of unfairness, in their interviews with me, and the prolonged interactions they had on this issue (see extract of their interactions in Appendix 12), indicated that this was an issue of significant importance to these boys. Although the boys' teachers did not comment on differential treatment of boys and girls, their comments did reflect differences in the way they perceived girls' and boys' ability in literacy, as illustrated in their comments below:

".. I find that the boys are very much minimal, they say 'but I've said what he looks like' and they've managed to say what the dragon looks like in two or three sentences and I've got a group of girls, high achieving girls, and their problem is they are just too flowery with their language the whole time. ... when we do writing they [*the boys*] tend to draw in sort of aliens, or zombies, so they do have a slightly different pool of knowledge [*than the girls*]." (Y5 teacher, phase 2)

"... girls are more inclined to read fictional writing ... and because of that rich knowledge base are more able to then think of the ingredients, the kind of description and the core elements and the purpose, and the ingredients are as important or more important than the technical structure ... the girls are more likely [*than the boys*] to want to write ". (Y6 teacher, phase 3)

These teachers' comments indicate they had strongly gendered views of boys and girls as literacy learners, with boys' seen to have a limited vocabulary and knowledge of the structure of writing due to a lack of experience of reading fiction books, whereas the

girls are viewed as more able writers as a result of their comparatively wider experience of reading, but the teachers did not mention any intervention they had made to address this situation. This finding chimes with the findings of Jones & Myhill (2004), that teachers tended to judge boys as low achievers and girls as higher achievers and that this influenced their expectations of boys' and girls' in the classroom (Myhill & Jones, 2006) and may have been a factor that affected students opportunities and engagement with writing. I would suggest the strongly gendered views these teachers had about boys and girls as readers and writers was the reason for their lack of intervention to encourage the boys to read more widely, something others have argued is important in learning to write (Barrs & Cork, 2001), and is a factor in the underperformance of boys in reading (Gorman, et al, 1998; OECD, 2001; Twist, et al, 2007).

In summary, my findings have shown that the boys had strongly gendered preferences for school subjects that required the least amount of literacy, such as maths and PE. Although the boys' extensive access to and use of their Q1s motivated them to write in the classroom, the boys' mostly accommodated these devices as a communication tool to write short messages to their friends, and as such, offered them little experience in engaging in longer and more sustained pieces of writing. However, most importantly, my findings have shown that the teachers' gendered view of boys and girls as literacy learners, with girls outperforming boys, has contributed to the teachers' inability to see the children as individuals with different needs and that this largely accounted for their lack of intervention to change this situation. As a result, the boys' gendered view of boys and girls as literacy learners, with girls outperforming boys in literacy in their school, strengthened as they progressed from Y4 to Y6.

The Estateside boys' feelings about writing

Boys were asked the question "Do you like writing?" A summary of their responses is shown in the table below:

Table 5.10 The Estateside boys' feelings about writing						
	Jack	Leo	Cal	Ian	Kelvin	Tate
phase 1	Likes writing; Q1s make writing easier; likes writing stories.	Dislikes writing; Q1s make writing easier.	Dislikes writing; Q1s make writing easier; likes poems.	Dislikes writing; Q1s make writing easier; likes stories & poems.	Dislikes writing; Q1s make writing easier; likes instructions & poems.	Dislikes writing; Q1s make writing easier.
phase 2	Likes imaginative writing; likes e-mails & text messages.	Dislikes long writing but likes text messages	Dislikes long writing but likes e-mails	Dislikes long writing but likes e-mails & text messages	Dislikes long writing but likes e-mails	Dislikes long writing but likes e-mails
phase 3	Depends on genre, likes factual writing (posters).	Ambivalent but likes factual writing (posters)	Likes factual but dislikes report writing	Ambivalent	Dislikes long writing but likes factual writing (posters) and e-mails	Ambivalent but likes instructions

The data in the table above shows that, in phases 1 and 2, with the exception of Jack who prefaced his feelings about writing with what he liked to write, the other boys prefaced their feelings about writing with what they disliked about writing, despite in phase 2, where Jack, Cal, Ian and Tate commented that they thought their writing had improved since Y4. However, in phase 3, with the exception of Kelvin who prefaced his feelings about writing with what he disliked, the boys were either ambivalent or prefaced their feelings with what they did like. Changes in the boys' feelings about writing as they progressed through the phases of this study, are illustrated in their comments shown below:

"I don't like writing cos when you start to write a lot your hand starts to hurt ... I like typing on the Q1s" (Tate, phase 1)

"I don't like writing but I like writing when we play a game called Ink Coaster um I know what I'm gonna write ... and I like e-mails and games with people cos sometimes if you spell and you know it's wrong the other person you're talking to won't say, oh, you've spelt that wrong ..." (Leo, phase 2)

"I think it's [*my writing*] improved in the way of quantity because I used to write, I used to not be able to write anything but now and cos if I did write a lot it's just because my handwriting is too big but now I'm going to make my handwriting smaller and I can write more. (Jack, phase 2)

"If it's something we can like make up or do something ourselves like if say, what happened over the weekend, if it's something like that then I like that, but if it's like a report or something then no I don't like that" (Cal, phase 3)

Tate and Leo's comments indicate they disliked writing because they had difficulty with the technical aspects of writing, such as aching hands and spelling. Although Jack thinks his writing has improved in terms of quantity, he judges this to be because his handwriting has got smaller and does not mention the quality of what he has written. By contrast, Cal's comment, prefaced with the kinds of writing he liked, was more typical of the comments made by the boys in this phase, indicating that they were slightly more positive about writing than they had been in phases 1 and 2 of this study. I now turn to a discussion of the technical difficulties the boys had with their writing.

Difficulties with the technical aspects of writing

With the exception of Cal in phase 2, all the other boys commented on difficulties with the technical aspects of writing in phases 1 and 2 of this study. Typical comments made by the boys about the technical aspects of writing are illustrated below:

"... I don't like writing cos I find it easier if we do it on our Q1s because if we do it on our Q1s our hands won't hurt ..." (Cal, phase 1)

"Me, um, I don't like spelling cos me and my friend .. we call it being brainy, because sometimes we know a word but it just gets like stuck in the back of our head. We've spelt it a lot of times but it just gets stuck in the back of our heads and we can't

remember how to spell it and you like ask somebody and it's a bit embarrassing"

(Jack, phase 2)

"... and sometimes I can't even spell 'the' and I have to ask someone cos I forgot."

(Ian, phase 2)

"I think punctuation [*is difficult*] and I just don't really think about it then and full stops and capital letters" (Kelvin, phase 2)

These boys' comments indicate that they were focusing on the technical aspects of writing and, I would suggest, this hindered them from thinking about the meaning and purpose in their writing. Jack and Ian's comments indicated that they were feeling anxious and this caused them to pause and question the spelling of even the simplest words and Kelvin's difficulty with punctuation suggests he was more focused on where to put his capital letters and full stops rather than the content of what he was writing. The Y5 teacher also commented on the boys' difficulties with punctuation, but indicated this was a difficulty for all the children in the class, not just the boys, as her comments below illustrate:

"... punctuation is quite a big one ... punctuation goes above everybody [*a difficulty for all the children*], which I think links into editing, so getting the children to be able to stop and read through their writing to pick out where the punctuation should go in [*is difficult*] ..." (Y5 teacher, phase 2)

The Y5 teacher's comments indicate that she was concerned about the children's ability to include punctuation in their writing and with their reluctance to edit their own writing and identify where to include punctuation. However, in phase 3 none of the boys mentioned difficulties with the technical aspects of writing and were more focused on the content of their writing than they were in phases 1 and 2, an issue I now move on to discuss.

Choice & genre

As can be seen in the table at the beginning of this section, with the exception of Jack and Ian in phase 1 who also said they liked writing stories, and Cal, Ian and Kelvin

who also liked writing poems, the boys genre preferences were dominated by their preference for writing e-mails and texts. Although Ian and Kelvin did not give a reason for their preference for poetry, Cal did and this is shown below:

“... I like to write poems, it just, if I write poems it makes me, if I’m angry it calms me down” (Cal, phase 1)

Cal indicates that writing a poem has the effect of calming him down. The Y5 teacher also thought that boys preferred to write poems and offers a different reason for this preference, as her comment below illustrates:

“They are very good at poetry ... quite free for them so they can take it in any direction ... “ (Y5 Teacher, phase 2)

The teacher’s comment indicated the boys liked writing poetry because they had more choice in writing poems than they had when writing in other genres. However, as discussed earlier in this Chapter, the boys commented that they would like to have more choice over the content for their writing, but that their teachers rarely gave them the opportunity to do this.

In phase 2, as shown in the table at the beginning of this section, although all the boys with the exception of Jack, said they disliked writing, they all said they liked writing e-mails or texts to their friends, as illustrated in their comments below:

“e-mailing cos you don’t have to write a lot ...” (Kelvin, phase 2)

“I prefer e-mailing because you just get to talk to people and they ask you straight away and you answer” (Tate, phase 2)

“I like it when we’re playing our own game or something and you can do like, you can say it to the whole place or you can just send a private message to someone cos it’s just like either e-mail or texting because you don’t have to write a whole word, most people say P L Z for please.” (Jack, phase 2)

“Well, you can write little words shorter like and you don’t have to um like write like in proper words you can just say it how you want to” (Ian, phase 2)

“I like e-mails and games with people cos sometimes if you spell and you know it’s wrong the other person you’re talking to won’t say, oh, you’ve spelt that wrong ...” (Leo, phase 2)

Kelvin liked writing e-mails because they were short; Tate likened e-mails to a conversation; Jack liked having a wider audience for his messages and liked the informality of being able to abbreviate his words; Ian liked the freedom to say what he wanted to say in the way he wanted to say it and Leo liked e-mails because he thought people would not judge his spelling, something he and the other boys were anxious about when they were writing in the classroom. As such, my findings agree with those who argued that computers motivated children to write (Cox, 1997; Lewis et al, 1999; Goldberg, 2003; Passey, et al, 2004), but, I would suggest that the boys’ accommodation of the devices, particularly at home, for short informal communications with their friends, did not serve to extend their repertoire of genres, such as web publishing, or to extend pieces of writing they had started in the classroom.

In phase 3, with the exception of Ian who did not state a genre preference, the other boys indicated a preference for factual writing, such as posters and instructions. Kelvin said he liked writing posters because “... we got to draw pictures as well ...” and Jack enjoyed this activity because he could “use our imagination as well, like making up prices...”. Although the boys did not mention the length of writing in the context of writing posters, I would suggest another reason they liked to write posters related to the little amount of writing required to create a poster, in contrast to a report, something Cal said he disliked. Further, I would suggest the unresolved difficulties the boys had in their relationships with the girls in this phase, and their strong sense of injustice in the classroom, as discussed earlier in this Chapter, would have had an impact on their ability to concentrate on longer pieces of writing. Nevertheless, the interaction between the boys about the reasons they liked writing posters also revealed other issues they faced in the classroom, as illustrated in Kelvin and Jack’s comments below:

“The only bad thing about it [*the posters*] was when like, um, someone says something and then asks you to change it to make it better and it ended up looking worse” (Kelvin, phase 3)

“Yes, because we really liked it, because in my one I did it in pencil and black paper so when the sun shined on it, it looked really good and then I was asked to change it over and over again, so I found it really horrible” (Jack, phase 3)

Although Kelvin and Jack had initially enjoyed the activity, they did not agree with the feedback they received from their teacher on how to improve their work, however, the negative comments they made about this feedback related to the part-time teacher who taught the class, as illustrated in Jack's comment below:

“And um, the teacher that comes in on Wednesday [*part time-teacher*] ... when we're trying to sort something ... when she comes to us she gives us an idea that we might not want to do and then she like basically forces us to do it and then if you don't want to do it cos it's our work and we want to make it as like, how we like it, she says to us, are you refusing a reasonable request, and it gets really annoying. ... and I don't learn anything it just makes me get doubts. Mr ... [*who teaches the class for four days a week*] guides us through it to tell us which parts we can like improve and change and it it's completely a mess and he can tell we haven't tried at all I think it's fair that we should start again. It's not often we do that, most of the time we try. (Jack, Estateside)

Jack's comments indicated the boys received two very different kinds of feedback from the two teachers who taught the class. The main Y6 teacher offered constructive advice that Jack accepted whereas the part-time teacher's insistence that Jack follow up on the feedback she had given him, whether he agreed or not, has removed ownership from him and left him questioning his own ability as a writer. Although my findings agree with others on the importance of regular constructive feedback in enabling children to make progress as writers (Ofsted, 2003; Westwood, 2008), my findings have also shown the importance of sensitivity when giving feedback to children so as not to remove ownership from them or undermine their self-belief.

Stamina & longer writing tasks

As can be seen in the table at the beginning of this section, with the exception of Jack in phase 2, the other boys indicated they had difficulty with longer pieces of writing, and this continued into phase 3, as illustrated in Kelvin and Cal's comments below, typical of the comments made by the boys.

"When, like, when the teachers say something like "when you've finished you get free time" and then when other people finish you're like the only ones left, and then you really want to rush it to get the free time" (Kelvin, phase 3)

It's the same as Kelvin, but if you're still on, if you're still doing your writing, people will come over and do games on the table you're actually writing on and it disturbs you and makes you want to get involved. (Cal, phase 3)

Kelvin and Cal both indicated they struggled to get their writing finished in the time allocated by their teacher and, in order not to lose face with their classmates, they either rushed their writing or did not finish their task in order to join in with the other children who were playing games. This finding chimes with the findings of Moss (2007), that where children's reading ability was more visible to the whole class, the boys were more keen than the girls to maintain their social status and position in their class and to do this they often made inappropriate reading choices to attempt to disguise their proficiency level. Although Jack did not comment on difficulties with completing his writing in the classroom, his frequent comments about being distracted from his writing as a result of the worsening conflicts between the boys and girls in phase 3, along with his continued preference for the kinds of writing that required the least amount of writing, were indicators that he too had some difficulty in sustaining longer pieces of writing in phase 3. Other reasons for the boys' difficulties with sustaining their writing in phase 3, were evident in the Y6 teacher's comments below:

“Well, we’ve written this year in my Y6 classroom, we’ve written lots of different genres ... I mean, we’ve literally written 12 or 13 different genres, you know, different types of text ... and I think that over the years, from Y1 where they start looking at the different genres and every year if they’re re-visiting, you know, they’re going back to those genres, when they come into year 6, I would hope, ideally what you’d expect is the children to say “oh yeh, I can remember the text features for an instruction, you put your imperative verbs in, you’ve got your instructions at the top, it’s easy, I can do that” ... then I think if you can get to that stage then you’ve got good writers and you’ve got successful writers, because that’s done, then all they need to think about is “what am I writing about?” and “How do I best?”, you know... (Y6 teacher, phase 3)

The Y6 teacher explained the boys difficulties in their readiness to write as the fault of other teachers in the school who, he believed, had not prepared the boys to write in the wide range of genres, necessary for writing in Y6. However, the Y4/Y5 teacher was already attempting to integrate two approaches to the teaching of writing, the NLS programme, criticized for a heavy focus on the technical aspects of writing (D’Arcy, 2000; Hilton, 2001; Andrews, 2005), with a themed approach where the focus was on contextualizing the writing, making it difficult for the teacher to incorporate a third focus, that of genre. Nevertheless, although the Y6 teacher criticizes other teachers for failing to teach the boys a wide range of genres, he does not comment on any support he has given them, as literacy leader, to help them to adapt their teaching.

In summary, my findings have shown that, with the exception of Jack who liked writing, the other boys were less negative and more ambivalent about writing when they were in Y6 than they had been in Y4/Y5. The key factors that had a positive influence on the boys’ attitude to writing were firstly a genre approach to teaching writing, where the boys were less anxious about the technical aspects of writing and more able to identify with genres in which they liked to write and secondly the classroom climate created by their main Y6 teacher where the boys felt they and their ideas were valued, and where they received constructive feedback on their writing. However, the improvement in the classroom climate created by the main Y6 teacher was undermined by the part time Y6 teacher who created a climate where the boys felt alienated from the classroom. Nevertheless, the boys and to a lesser extent Jack, had difficulty sustaining their writing in Y6, where they were required to write longer and

more challenging pieces of writing, and my findings have shown that this was the result of their teachers: lack of intervention to find out or to address the boys' issues, most significantly their strong sense of injustice and worsening relationships with the girls; and lack of collaboration between teachers themselves about an approach to teaching writing, that best prepared the boys for the changing demands of writing as they progressed through the school.

Conclusion & Discussion

In conclusion, my interviews with the six Estateside boys showed that, with the exception of Jack who was more positive about writing throughout the phases, the boys were slightly more positive about writing in phase 3 than they had been in phases 1 and 2. These changes are reflected in Cal's comments where he said in phase 1 "I don't like writing", to his comments in phase 3 where he stated "If it's something we can like make up ... like what happened over the weekend ... then I like that ...". However, this masked other continuing difficulties the boys had in sustaining their writing and I have argued that this was largely the result of the boys' strong sense of inequity in the classroom and their difficult relationships with the girls, that distracted them and meant they had difficulty concentrating on longer writing tasks. Most importantly, I have shown that where their teachers viewed the boys through the lens of their gender, rather than as individuals, this had a significant influence on their interactions with the boys and girls in the classroom, and contributed to the boys' strong sense of inequity and low self-belief.

My findings resonate with the findings of others that the focus in the debate on the underachievement of boys, in contrast to girls who were viewed as higher achievers, had served to mask other issues such as the girls who are underachieving (Jackson, D, 1998; Jones & Myhill, 2004; Francis & Skelton, 2005) and drawn attention away from other issues that affect children's performance, such as poverty, race, ethnicity and sexuality and the kinds of pedagogy that can help all children to improve (Martino, 2008; Lingard, et al, 2009; Watson, et al, 2010). However, my findings have also shown that in practice where teachers held strongly gendered views of boys and girls as literacy learners, they remained unaware of the issues the boys faced, how to address these issues, or the need to intervene to change the situation for the boys. As a

result, as the boys progressed from Y4 to Y6, their situation worsened, as did their sense of inequity and alienation from their literacy learning in their classroom.

The issue of unfairness and lack of trust was raised by the boys frequently in each of the three phases of this study, but, in phase 3, the majority of the comments about unfairness were confined to the part time Y6 teacher who taught the class and staff who supervised the children at lunchtime. The boys expressed strong views that they were disciplined unfairly as a gendered group, rather than as individuals, and their anxiety about this issue distracted them from concentrating on their writing, as Cal in Y6 commented "... so it ends up frustrating the boys so they do less work". The lack of intervention on the part of the boys' Y4, Y5 and Y6 teachers, to find out about or to address the issue of the boys' feelings of inequity and poor relationships with the girls, contributed to a worsening in the situation and a decline in the girls' behaviour, that the boys described as 'laddish'. The boys' frustration with the lack of intervention to improve things for them was evident in Jack's comments in Y6, where he said: "... I think we should set it into an actual debate in the classroom so we can sort out our problems ...". I have argued that this unresolved situation was a contributory factor in the breakdown of trust between the teachers and the boys, and explained why the boys were rarely given the opportunity to have autonomy over their writing, such as writing with their peers, that further fuelled their perception that they were not trusted. In this climate, the boys were less able to concentrate on their writing, lacked self-belief and found it hard to persevere to overcome difficulties in their writing. Although, to a certain extent, the use of their Q1 computers relieved their concerns about handwriting, and gave the boys some sense of autonomy over their writing, I have argued the predominant use of these devices for short pieces of writing did not exploit the potential they offered for extended writing, such as enabling the boys to further develop and complete writing begun in the classroom at home, something the boys complained they frequently did not have time for in the classroom.

However, a change in teaching approach adopted by their main Y6 teacher, from a technical to a genre focus, did have a positive impact on the boys' feelings about writing in Y6, and I have argued that this was because the boys were less anxious about their difficulties with the technical aspects of writing, such as handwriting, spelling and punctuation and more able to see the meaning and purpose of their

writing. However, the main Y6 teacher thought the children were less well prepared to write in a range of genres than they should have been when they entered Y6 and blamed his colleagues in the school for not preparing the children adequately, when he said "... from Y1 ... if they're revisiting [*genres*] when they come into Y6 [*they would know how to write in different genres*]... and you've got successful writers because that's done ...". Although the main Y6 teacher was also the literacy leader, he tended to blame his colleagues for not adequately preparing the boys for Y6, rather than talk about what he could have done to ensure his colleagues were aware of the demands of writing in each different year and how they could best plan their teaching to smooth the transition for the boys between year groups. This lack of collaboration between teachers to share practice was also evident in the contrasts between the boys' description of the poor feedback they received on their writing from their part time Y6 teacher with the constructive feedback given to them by their main Y6 teacher. This meant the potential benefits to the boys' self-belief as a result of the teaching of their main Y6 teacher, was undermined, evident in Jack's comments in Y6 where he said of his part time teacher: "... and I don't learn anything it just makes me get doubts".

With the exception of Jack, the boys received little or no literacy support from their families at home, but my findings have also shown that a contributory factor was the lack of dialogue between the teachers and the boys' families about the boys' literacy learning. Although the main Y6 teacher's intervention to encourage the boys to read at home with their families, did contribute to all the boys, with the exception of Cal, receiving literacy support from their families in Y6, the Y6 teacher was unaware of this and blamed the lack of success of the initiative on the boys' themselves and their families. However, I have argued that the Headteacher and Y6 teacher's dilemma about the most appropriate books to recommend to the children and the lack of a whole school policy to encourage all teachers to engage in a dialogue with the boys' families, was more likely to be an explanation for the lack of family support for the boys' literacy learning at home. My findings agree with those who argued that family intervention programmes encouraged families to get involved in their children's literacy learning (Jeynes, 2005; Dearing, et al, 2006), and this is particularly important for children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds (Dearing, et al 2006). But my findings have shown that where teachers judged the boys' families by their socio-economic background, rather than their individual ability to help their boys, it

was less likely that the school would initiate an intervention programme, to try to fully engage the families in their boys' literacy learning.

Finally, my findings have shown that the fragmented approach to the teaching of literacy in Estateside contributed to little or no change in the boys' attitude to writing as they progressed through the phases of this study. Although the boys benefited from the more sensitive approach to teaching adopted by their main Y6 teacher, the boys continued to find it difficult to concentrate on and sustain their writing. I have argued that this was the result of the teachers': lack of effective intervention to identify and address the boys' strong sense of inequity in the classroom and the resulting difficult relationships they had with the girls, or to understand the impact of this on the boys' ability to concentrate on their writing in the classroom; lack of collaboration between the teachers to critically reflect on and share their literacy practice, and the lack of a regular dialogue with the boys' families to ensure the boys developed the habit of writing both at home and school. Although I did not have access to the boys' individual performance data in writing and cannot comment on their progress in writing, my findings have shown that in the conditions described in this Chapter, the boys held strong beliefs that girls were better at literacy and writing than they were, lacked self-belief and found it difficult to sustain their writing, particularly in Y6 where they were required to undertake longer and more challenging writing tasks.

I now move on to explore my findings from the last of the three schools where I conducted this study.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS: BROOKTOWN

Introduction

In this Chapter I provide an analysis of the data from Brooktown School, collected through focus group interviews with a small group of four boys in the first phase and three in the second and third phases and semi-structured interviews with their six teachers. The data were collected from boys and their teachers in the same years and over the same time periods as the data from Somerview and Estateside schools. To reiterate, although the numbers of boys and teachers I interviewed was small, my findings from Brooktown have shown that the boys' feelings about writing were strongly influenced by the climate for learning created by their individual classroom teachers and their approach to teaching writing. Most importantly, my findings have raised the issues of teachers' ability to see children as individuals, rather than through the lens of their socio-economic background or their gender; and the influence of stereotyping on teachers' expectations of children and the extent of the interventions they make to help the children make progress in their literacy learning.

Context of the school

Once again, background details of the school, including factors such as deprivation indicator and attainment scores for English at KS2, are given in the Methodology Chapter of this thesis. I provide here a summary of the school context, details of the management in the school and the school approach to teaching literacy at KS2.

The school is an expanding school, in the process of expanding from two-form to three-form entry, set in a culturally diverse area where about 35 different languages are spoken. The proportion of pupils, 58.9% who speak a first language other than English is significantly higher than the National average of 13.4%. Almost all pupils begin in the nursery with limited language, communication and social skills. Most families live in areas of high population density in cramped conditions. The number of

pupils in receipt of free school meals is above average. A high proportion of pupils do not live with their parents, and many of these are asylum seekers and refugees from war-torn zones. There is a high proportion of pupils joining or leaving the school at times other than the start of the year. In 2004 the school was identified by the local authority as in need of intensive help due to very low standards of pupils' attainment and quality of teaching and learning. This help came in the form of a federation with a neighbouring school, which had a history of success. The federation included the leadership of a highly successful Headteacher and access to experienced staff from the federated school and to highly experienced consultants recruited by the Headteacher to work alongside staff in a coaching and mentoring role and to model teaching. This Headteacher made significant changes to the management and curriculum. Many staff left the school as a result of the changes, and the federated Headteacher appointed new staff. In October 2006 Ofsted inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the school to be Grade 3 (satisfactory). The federation ended in 2007 when a new Headteacher was appointed to the school. Although there were fewer external consultants working in the school between 2007-2008, in the first phase of this study, some subject consultants continued to support the school and were contributing to the teaching of the Y4 boys I interviewed.

Approach to teaching literacy

The details of the school approach to teaching literacy I give here are summarised from the school web site, as I was unable to gain access to the school literacy policy. The school follows the National Literacy Strategy framework for teaching and links are made to the National Curriculum subjects so that children have a range of cross curricular experiences in literacy, and become immersed in the literacy aspect of a range of topics. The principal aim is to develop children's knowledge, skills and understanding of literacy. All children have the opportunity to experience a wide range of texts, in a variety of genre, and use a range of resources including computers. The school uses a programme to help children develop speaking, listening, phonological awareness and oral blending and segmenting. To support children in reading proficiency a reading scheme is used throughout the school. The school aims to provide challenging learning opportunities for all children through differentiated

activities. In guided reading groups there is clear differentiation, with reading books and activities suited to the needs of the group. All children in Years 1-6 have a writing target. As well as supporting children with their literacy homework, reading everyday and practising spellings, families are encouraged to use the school interactive literacy games posted on the school web site. All children have access to the school computers in the ICT suite.

Focus group interviews with the Brooktown boys and semi-structured interviews with their teachers

The purpose of the focus group interviews was to gain a deeper insight into the boys' feelings about writing in their school classrooms. The literacy leader, in conjunction with the Year 4 teachers, selected four boys to take part in the interviews, two fewer than I had requested. The size of the group was further reduced in phases 2 and 3 as a result of one boy being absent from school in phase 2 and another boy having left the school during the academic year in phase 3. Rosier (1977) highlighted the difficulties for researchers in accessing the same group of students in longitudinal studies and suggested missing students could be replaced with students of similar characteristics; but as I was not informed in advance that there were missing students, I was unable to arrange for replacements. The boys were also drawn from three different classes and did not know each other well. These issues did affect the level of interaction between the boys, but this was not the case when they were talking about activities they had enjoyed, such as a digital writing activity, or issues they felt particularly strongly about, such as gender. Although, I did not pursue the questions the boys were reluctant to answer, because I did not want to put them under undue pressure, their responses to my questions, and their interactions on topics they felt strongly about, did enable me to gain some valuable insights into their feelings about themselves as literacy learners in their school.

To re-iterate, the purpose of the semi-structured interviews with the teachers was to explore their perspective on the teaching and learning of writing in Brooktown School. Although I interviewed the teachers in phases 2 and 3, I was not given access to the teachers in phase 1 but was asked by the Headteacher to interview the literacy leader.

My meeting with the literacy leader was extremely brief, as she told me she was unable to be interviewed because she had other commitments and it was impossible to book another date as she was leaving the school at the end of the summer term.

However, in phases 2 and 3, the new literacy leader at the school facilitated my interviewing the three Y5 and three Y6 teachers for short interviews, of less than 15 minutes each. Although I interviewed six teachers, as two of them did not teach the boys I interviewed I have not included their comments in this Chapter. Nevertheless, I re-read their interviews many times to ensure there were no new issues emerging.

Throughout this Chapter I have referred to the boys' teachers with the year group they taught followed by initials of their pseudonyms, such as "H" for Hakan, "J" for John, "E" for Elan and "U" for Uri. One of the Y6 teachers was also the literacy leader for the school and I have indicated this with the abbreviation LL. The table below shows which teacher taught the boys in the different phases of this study and the boys who were present at the interview.

Table 6.0 Brooktown boys' teachers				
	Hakan	John	Elan	Uri
Y5 teacher (H&J)	√	√		
Y5 teacher (E)			√	√ (Uri absent from interview)
Y6 teacher (H&J)	√	√		
Y6 teacher/LL (U)			√ (Elan left the school)	√

As can be seen from the table above, Hakan and John were in the same class and Elan and Uri were in the same class, but Uri did not attend the interview in Y5 because he was absent from school on the day of the interview, and Elan because he had left the school in Y6 before I interviewed the group. However, Uri's class teacher said she did not teach him writing because the children were grouped into ability sets in Y6 and as she taught the top set, which only included four boys, none of which were the boys I interviewed. Nevertheless, I have included her comments as they have relevance to Uri's feelings about the school, classroom and literacy and her comments provided some additional insights into the teaching and learning of writing in Brooktown.

Summary of findings from analysis of focus group interviews with the Brooktown boys and semi-structured interviews with their teachers

I undertook my analysis of the data from my interviews with the boys and their teachers in the same way as I did with the data from Somerview and Estateside schools, with the aim of seeking explanations for the boys' attitude to writing and changes in their attitude over time. My analysis of the data revealed the same seven categories as emerged in my analysis of the data from Somerview and Estateside and these were: attitude to literacy and writing; difficulties with writing; differential performance; fairness; parental support; barriers to learning and motivation. I provide a summary of my findings from this analysis, matched against these categories, as shown in the table below:

Table 6.1 Summary of findings from analysis of focus group interviews with the Brooktown boys and semi-structured interviews with their teachers						
Categories	Phase	Hakan	Uri*	Elan*	John	Teachers
Attitude to literacy & writing	1	Hakan, Uri & John were very positive about writing, Elan was more ambivalent, but all four boys were critical of the quality of teaching provided by their Y4 teachers. Without exception, the boys had a preference for subjects that required the least amount of literacy, such as PE and maths				Y4 teachers were supported by external subject experts, such as a literacy/ICT specialist, who also led some of the teaching, such as the digital story activity.
	2&3	In phase 2 the boys were much less positive, Hakan was unable to cite anything he had enjoyed and Elan & John, enjoyed only one topic for writing. In phase 3 Hakan & Elan were more ambivalent, linking their liking of writing to particular genres, whereas John continued to be particularly negative. As phase 1, the boys had strong preferences for subjects that required the				Y5 teachers had heavy focus on the technical aspects in their teaching of writing, whereas Y6 teachers focused on genre.

		least literacy.	
Difficulties with writing	1	Without exception the boys had difficulty with the technical aspects of writing, particularly handwriting & suffered from aching hands.	
	2&3	With the exception of Hakan and Uri in phase 3, all the boys mentioned difficulties with the technical aspects of writing. However, in phases 2 & 3 all the boys had particular difficulty in sustaining their writing.	As phases 2 & 3 above. Y5 & Y6 teachers blamed children's difficulties on either the boys themselves or their families rather than what they could do to help them.
Differential performance	1	Hakan, Uri & John thought girls behaved better than the boys & Elan thought the girls had more opportunities to do well.	
	2&3	In phase 2, Hakan and in phase 3, Hakan, Uri & John thought that girls outperformed boys in literacy, with John continuing to think that girls outperformed boys in their behaviour in the classroom.	With the exception of Y5 teacher (E), who viewed the children as a whole class, rather than as individuals, the other teachers had gendered perceptions of children as literacy learners with girls outperforming boys in literacy.
Fairness	1	Without exception, the boys thought they were treated less fairly than the girls by their teachers	
	2&3	As above	As above, and teachers were unaware of the impact of their views on the boys.

Parental support	1	Hakan & Elan received support from families but Uri and John did not.	
	2&3	As above	All four teachers blamed children's disadvantaged socio-economic background for their difficulties in literacy in school and did not identify strategies to engage the families in their children's literacy learning at home.
Barriers to learning	1	Hakan mentioned misbehaviour, Uri & Elan mentioned chatting and Uri & John mentioned teacher shouting.	
	2&3	Without exception, the boys mentioned misbehaviour as a barrier to their concentration & this worsened for them over time, with the boys likening their classroom to the playground in phase 3.	The teachers were aware the children had difficulties with focusing on their writing, but explained this in terms of technical difficulties rather than unresolved issues with misbehaviour in the class.
Motivation	1	All four boys motivated by working in teams, using storyboards, cameras and computers to create animated stories	Taught by external ICT/literacy expert.
	2&3	In phase 2 boys lacked motivation to write, Hakan could not remember anything he had enjoyed, whereas Elan & John had only enjoyed writing about myths & legends. In phase 3 all three boys were more	Teachers were closely following the NLS teaching programme, & this limited the extent of choice & independence the children had in their writing. Y6 teachers

		motivated to write when they were writing with their peers or writing in their preferred genre, but did not mention being given a choice over topic or genre.	blamed their colleagues for the children's lack of independence as writers.
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*Uri was not present at the interview in phase 2 because he was absent from school on the day of the interview and Elan was not present in phase 3 because he had left the school.

** Interviews with teachers did not take place in phase 1, as discussed earlier in this Chapter.

As the categories above emerged in relation to the boys' feelings about their school, classroom, literacy and writing and in order to best explain my findings in this Chapter, I have embedded the eight categories under these same headings I used for Somerview and Estateside schools, as shown below:

The Brooktown boys' feelings about school

School support for literacy & fairness

Home & school support for literacy

The Brooktown boys' feelings about the classroom

Barriers to learning & fairness

Perceptions of fairness in relation to gender

Autonomy & motivation

The Brooktown boys' feelings about literacy

Gendered preferences for school subjects

Beliefs about differential performance

The Brooktown boys' feelings about writing

Difficulties with the technical aspects of writing

Choice & genre

Stamina & longer writing tasks

I now turn to a discussion of the boys' feelings about school.

The Brooktown boys' feelings about school

Boys were asked the question “Do you like school?” Their responses are summarised below:

Table 6.2 The Brooktown boys' feelings about school				
	Hakan	Uri	Elan	John
phase 1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
phase 2	Depends on subject		Depends on subject	Depends on subject
phase 3	Depends on subject	Depends on subject		Depends on subject & teachers

As can be seen from the table above, the boys' were more positive about their school in phase 1 than they were in phases 2 and 3, where their feelings depended on the subject they were studying or their teachers. The changes in their feelings are illustrated in their comments below:

“Yeh, it's alright, it's good.” (Hakan, phase 1)

“I sometimes enjoy some of the bits and I do like PE and ICT ...” (Elan, phase 2)

“Hum, it's hard to say really, it's half and half ... I like maths and PE but I don't like the teachers... cos they're annoying and always tell you off for something you didn't do.” (John, phase 3)

In phase 1, the boys all said they liked school, as illustrated in Hakan's comments above, but this conflicted with negative comments they made about their teachers as discussed in the next part of this section. In phases 2 and 3, their feelings about their school reflected their preferences for certain subjects or, as John has commented, his feelings about how he was treated by his teachers, and these are issues I return to later in this Chapter.

School support for literacy & fairness

Boys were asked the question “Is there something the school could do to help you with your writing?” The boys’ responses are shown below:

Table 6.3 The Brooktown boys’ perceptions of how the school could help them with literacy				
	Hakan	Uri	Elan	John
phase 1	Get better teachers	Get better teachers	Get better teachers	Get better teachers
phase 2	Shrugged shoulders		Shrugged shoulders	Shrugged shoulders
phase 3	Nothing	Nothing		Nothing

The data in the table above shows that the boys were all concerned with the quality of literacy teaching in phase 1, but were reluctant to respond to my question related to school support for literacy in phases 2 and 3, where they either shrugged their shoulders or just answered “no” to the question and were unwilling to expand on their response. The comments made by the boys about the quality of literacy teaching in phase 1 are shown below:

“I think they should hire a teacher that’s an expert at literacy which would really help you with the literacy and writing and stuff” (Hakan, phase 1)

“I think they should get more supply teachers and pay more for their work so they get more clever teachers so they can help us” (John, phase 1)

“Well, like more teachers that can help you write or do maths or any kind of subjects.” (Elan, phase 1)

“You could have like a teacher that is good at science, geography and history and any subjects they’re good at so that they can extend our learning more...” (Uri, phase 1)

The boys’ comments indicate their strong dissatisfaction with the quality of literacy teaching in phase 1 and their comments imply that they felt this was unfair because they were not able to get the help they felt they needed. Nevertheless, to a certain extent these comments conflict with the positive comments the boys made about their

feelings about their school and about writing in this phase. However, in phase 1, some of the external consultants who had worked with the federated Headteacher the year prior to phase 1, continued to work in the school and the boys were taught by these consultants, for example, an art consultant and an ICT/Literacy consultant led the teaching of several units of work and the boys talked about these activities in their interviews with me. I would suggest the boys' comments reflected their experiences of being taught by consultants who were expert in their own subjects in contrast to their class teachers or supply teachers who may not have had the same level of expertise. Similarly, I would suggest the boys lack of ideas about what the school could do to help them, when they were asked this question in phases 2 and 3 of this study, related to the reduction in exposure they had to the strategies used by external consultants in Y4, that gave them a language to talk about the teaching and learning of writing.

Home & school support for literacy

Boys were asked the question "Do you write at home?" and "Is there anyone who helps you with your writing?" Their responses are summarised below:

Table 6.4 The support the Brooktown boys received in their homes and school for their literacy learning.				
	Hakan	Uri	Elan	John
phase 1	Writes stories at home; Mum helps	Homework; Teacher helps	Homework & writing about football; Mum & dad help	Does not write at home, only draws pictures; No-one helps
phase 2	Used to write stories; No-one helps		Homework; Mum & dad help	Does not write at home; Teacher helps
phase 3	Sometimes writes stories; Mum, dad & teacher help	Sometimes writes at home; Teacher helps		Does not write at home, only draws pictures. No-one helps

The data in the table above shows that with the exception of Hakan who wrote stories and John who did not write at home, Uri and Elan mainly wrote at home to complete

their homework. Although Hakan and Elan received help from their families at home, Uri and John did not.

“Well, at home, when my mum, she says to me like, not normal stuff like in school, she teaches me so that I get a better grade a better level from writing” (Hakan, phase 1)

“... when I was writing [*in class*] I couldn't write properly and my teacher showed me how to write the word this year and I learned how to write better” (Uri, phase 2)

“Um stories, cos if I don't get any homework my mum and dad says if you don't get any homework you need to do something to encourage you. That's why I always do lots of stories and that's how I am getting better at writing and all I need to do now is work on my maths.” (Elan, phase 2)

“No [*I don't write at home*] I just draw pictures ... no-one helps me [*at home*] ... my teacher helps [*at school*]” (John, phase 3)

Although Uri and John did not receive literacy support from their families at home, Hakan and Elan did and their comments indicated that their families were very concerned that they should do well and sought to give them every encouragement at home. Despite Hakan and Elan's families' attempts to provide literacy support for their boys at home, their teachers' comments indicated they believed the children lacked the literacy experiences in their homes necessary for learning in school, as illustrated in their comments below:

“Well, it's the experiences really, especially when you're trying to get them to enter into the world of books and use their imagination, it's [*writing*] very hard for them, because they haven't had the experiences of language in lots of cases [*in their homes*]” (Y5 teacher (H&J), phase 2)

“... if you don't have a language rich background, coming to school sentence structure they find difficult in terms of connectives, using noun clauses and knowing

where to put the full stop... that's why they've got lots of prompt cards so that they take it on board and internalize the language structures and features so they can use it themselves. They would have got it say when they were little and the parent would have modeled for them the language but if you're not in that language rich environment the school now has to model that, so I'm doing that work that the parent would have done but in terms of prompt cards" (Y5 teacher (E), phase 2)

"... and I think that they have a problem with grammatical structure and that's right across the school really and I think that has a lot to do with, um, trying to teach them the difference between spoken language with your friends and writing grammatically correct sentences because a lot of them don't speak in a formal, Queen's English way". (Y6 teacher (H&J), phase 3)

"Sentence structure is something and I don't know if the other teachers told you that, but that goes across the board because of course a lot of the children have English as a second language and so if they're not speaking the language as it's expected here, then they find that difficult." (Y6 teacher/LL (U), phase 3)

The boys' Y5 and Y6 teachers thought all the children in Brooktown had difficulties with grammar and that their problems related to the differences between the language the children used in their homes and the language expected of them in school and that the spoken language the children used in their homes had a detrimental effect on their understanding of the grammatical structures expected of them in the school. These findings echo the findings of Heath (1982) that children from different communities experienced different literacy practices in their homes, through their daily interaction with adults, and that these differences accounted for differences in the children's response to their formal literacy learning in school. Further, Heath (1982) found that where there was a conflict between the home and school experience, the children found it more difficult to adapt and make progress than the children who lived in homes where their literacy practices were similar to the school. Other researchers' findings have led them to agree with Heath (1982), that children's literacy success at school was more about the extent to which their literacy learning in their homes coincided or conflicted with the kinds of literacy learning expected in their schools (Street, 1984; Jones, P., 2013), than with a notion of language deficit, embedded in Bernstein's 1971 theory (Bernstein, 1971).

Although the Y5 teacher (E) sought to help the children with their difficulties by introducing “prompt cards”, neither she nor her colleagues differentiated between the children as individuals, rather, they judged all the children to have had similar experiences and this judgment was based on a stereotype of the language children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds experienced in their homes. This finding agrees with the findings of others, that children from socio-economically disadvantaged families were not exposed in their homes to the kind of language used in formal writing at school (Kress, 1994) and that this had led to misconceptions on the part of their teachers about the children's abilities (Kress, 1994; Gipps, 1999; Paechter, 2007). Further, in phase 3, the Y6 teacher/LL (U) commented:

“You look at how they are taught, and they are taught the correct way but they get to Y6 and they're still not doing something like as simple as putting a full stop at the end of a sentence or a capital letter at the beginning.” (Y6 teacher/LL (U), phase 3)

This teacher's comment reveals that she did not think the fault lie in the teaching of literacy in the school, indicating she was not considering adapting or changing practice to help the children to improve, such as looking beyond the classroom to engage the children's families in their literacy learning, rather, she had accepted the situation as it was, and this reflected both her and her colleagues' low expectations of the children in the school. As a result the boys had low self-belief and the boys' families were either unaware of the need to help their boys or unsure how best to help them. As Hakan said his mum was teaching him “not normal stuff like in school”, and although he thought this was helping him, I would suggest it would have been more beneficial if his mum had a regular dialogue with Hakan's teacher about what he was learning in literacy, with suggestions as to how she could help him at home. Others have argued that where schools intervened to encourage families to get more involved with their children's education, the improvement in relationships between families and teachers led to improvements in children's attitude and performance in school (Jeynes, 2005; Dearing, et al 2006 & 2008).

In summary, the boys' initial reactions showed they were more positive about their school in phase 1 than they were in phases 2 and 3, but this masked the boys'

dissatisfaction with the quality of literacy teaching in phase 1, where they thought the school should do more to recruit teachers who were experts in the subjects they taught. The boys' teachers highlighted the difficulties all the children had with grammar, and although there was some intervention to help the children in the classroom, this did not extend to entering into a dialogue with the children's families, because the teachers strongly believed that the children's families were the cause of the boys' difficulties with grammar. As a result, the teachers had lower expectations of what the boys could achieve in writing and did not engage the boys' families in their literacy learning at home. Although John and Uri's families did not help them with their work at home, Hakan and Elan's families did help, but the lack of dialogue with the teachers meant the families were unsure what the boys' literacy learning at school involved or how they could best help them to make progress.

The Brooktown boys' feelings about the classroom

The boys' feelings about the classroom emerged in their answers to questions I asked them relating to what hampered their learning, how they were treated by their teachers and what things made it easier for them to write. I begin with what hampered their learning.

Barriers to learning

Boys were asked the question "Is there anything that stops you from learning?" Their responses are summarised below:

Table 6.5 Barriers to learning for the Brooktown boys in their classroom				
	Hakan	Uri	Elan	John
phase 1	Misbehaviour & unfairness	Chatting; teacher next door shouting	Chatting; unfairness	Teacher & children shouting
phase 2	Misbehaviour		Misbehaviour	Misbehaviour
phase 3	Misbehaviour	Misbehaviour		Misbehaviour & children shouting; unfairness

As can be seen from the data in the table above, in all three phases, the misbehaviour of other children, and the level of noise in the classroom, from children and teachers shouting, were the major barriers to the boys' learning across the phases of this study. Typical comments made by the boys are shown below:

"When you like, when you're doing your work, when you're trying to do your work um, some like, when you don't like, the people who talk a lot they can distract you from trying your best and then the teacher might send you out for talking." (Elan, phase 1)

"My teacher is always angry ... and other people keep shouting and she shouts at them and um my teacher shouts at us so that it stopped. (John, phase 1)

"... and like, the next door neighbour class always do something like the teacher always shouts and that annoys me and I can't, then I can't remember what to do." (Uri, phase 1)

"Some people, for example, get to flicking and making paper aeroplanes and throw it to my side of the room and they get to keep on annoying me." (Elan, phase 2)

"... playtime in the classroom ...[causes] ...distractions in class" (Hakan, phase 3)

"When people are shouting you should put earplugs in so you block out all the noise ... and they [teachers] always tell you off for something you didn't do." (John, phase 3)

Throughout the three phases of this study the boys commented on the misbehaviour of other children and high levels of noise in the classroom that distracted them from their learning and this was exacerbated, as John and Uri have commented in phase 1, when their teachers got angry and shouted at the children. In phase 2 Elan again comments on children being silly in the classroom and in phase 3, all three boys commented that other children behaved in the classroom as they did in the playground, indicating the behaviour of children in the classroom had worsened in this phase. This indicated that the children had little control over their own behaviour or the impact of their behaviour on the social interactions in the classroom, at an important time for them when they

were preparing for their SATs tests. Both Elan and John also commented that although they had not initiated the chatting in class, they were sometimes drawn into it and were then, unfairly in their view, disciplined by their teachers. However, the comments the teachers made do not reflect the comments made by the boys, as illustrated below:

“No [*I don't discipline the children*] ...I use resources, so I'll say well look you can use this. Because usually when they're off task it's because they've stopped thinking and they haven't got anything to say...” (Y5 teacher, (E) phase 2)

“... by this time of year they would be getting on because they'd know that if you don't do this in a certain amount of time, you're going to stay in because you are going to do this work, so I don't have any problems like that at this time of year. I tend to, at the beginning of the year I would sit down and ask them why they're not [*writing*] ... and there's boys who I know who will sit there and muck around because in their mind “I just don't know what to write, I can't come up with any ideas”. ... So, we've spent time with those children on their units and spent more time on their planning.” (Y6 teacher, (H&J) phase 3)

Both these teachers' comments indicate that they thought they had resolved the issue of misbehaviour, either through the use of extensive resources, as in the case of the Y5 teacher (E) or through talking to the boys and helping them with their planning, as in the case of the Y6 teacher (H&J). These comments indicate that the teachers were either unaware of the impact of misbehaviour on the boys' ability to concentrate on their writing or, understandably, they did not want to admit that misbehaviour was an issue in their class to an outsider they did not know well.

Perceptions of fairness in relation to gender

Boys were asked the question “Do you think teachers treat boys and girls the same?” Their responses are summarised in the table below:

Table 6.6 The Brooktown boys' perceptions of the way they were treated by their teachers				
	Hakan	Uri	Elan	John
phase 1	Girls favoured	Girls favoured	Girls favoured	Girls favoured
phase 2	Girls favoured		Girls favoured	Girls favoured
phase 3	Girls favoured	Girls favoured		Girls favoured

As can be seen from the data in the table above, the boys unequivocally felt that the girls received more favourable treatment from the teachers than the boys. The reasons they gave for this are illustrated in their comments below:

“In our class we have two teachers, but when boys talk, they don’t even have a chance, but when girls talk they have two chances, but we say it’s not fair, the teachers say it is fair...” (Uri, phase 1)

“My teacher, he picks people to go and work with the infants and it’s always girls no boys... I think it’s wrong really. I keep thinking to myself, why does he keep choosing girls, why doesn’t he choose a boy. And I think it’s so bad because boys don’t get chosen to be student of the week cos I’m a boy.” (Hakan, phase 2)

“Our teacher says “if you chew gum you have to stay in at lunchtime” but only boys who chew gum have to stay in and a few days ago a girl was caught and she [*the teacher*] didn’t say anything” (John, phase 3)

The boys’ comments indicate they felt the boys were treated less fairly than the girls in terms of the way they were disciplined and were not trusted by their teachers to take on jobs with responsibility, such as reading with younger children or being nominated for ‘student of the week’. Although the Y5 teacher (E) did not differentiate between boys and girls, and thought that all the children in her class struggled to control their behaviour, the other three teachers I interviewed thought the boys were less able than the girls to do this, and typical comments they made are illustrated below:

“Er, I think boys get off task very quickly, very quickly, er girls tend to talk to each other and they do share ideas, some of them have a little strop to show

their emotions, whereas the boys down tools basically.” (Y5 teacher (H&J), phase 2)

“I think girls are more willing to add those improvements [*to their writing*] ... but as a group of boys they’ve written as much as they’re gonna write, and they go away and they won’t change it, because to them they’ve finished that and the boys find it more difficult to sustain their writing” (Y6 teacher/LL (U), phase 3)

These teachers comments indicate they thought the boys were less able to take responsibility for their own learning and less able to sustain their writing, in comparison to the girls who they viewed as more willing to persevere with difficulties, indicating they viewed the boys as an underachieving group, rather than as individuals with different strengths and weaknesses. These findings concur with the findings of others (Jones & Myhill, 2004; Myhill & Jones, 2006) that teachers tended to construct all boys as underachievers who worked less hard and were less co-operative than girls, but that the extent to which pupils participated in the classroom was more strongly associated with achievement than gender, and that underachieving girls and boys “often had more in common with each other than with those with whom they shared a gender” (Jones & Myhill, 2004:570).

Autonomy & motivation

Boys were asked the question “What sort of things make it easy to write?” The boys talked about support for handwriting, planning their writing, writing with a partner, and choosing what to write about as summarised below:

Table 6.7 Teaching strategies that motivated the Brooktown boys to write				
	Hakan	Uri	Elan	John
phase 1	Knowing your spellings; Storyboards to plan animations	Handwriting guidelines; Team work to create animations	Handwriting guidelines; Team work to create animations	Handwriting guidelines; Animations
phase 2	Drawing pictures in stories; choice of topic		Brainstorm or spider webs; choice of topic	Choice of topic
phase 3	Teacher gives us ideas	Writing with a partner		Writing in a group & sharing ideas; choice of topic

As can be seen from the data in the table above, the boys found it helpful to have guidelines for their handwriting, planning tools such as storyboards and spider webs, choice of topics and writing together with their peers. With regard to their comments about handwriting guidelines and animated stories in phase 1, as these comments related to the difficulties they had with writing and to their preferred genre, I have discussed these more fully later in this Chapter in the context of the boys' feelings about writing. I focus here on the boys' comments about choice in writing and peer support for writing.

The importance of motivation in writing was evident in the boys' feelings about being able to choose what to write about, as illustrated in their comments below:

“Cos it [*choosing*] makes it easier what kind of story you want to write.” (John, phase 2)

“If you have subjects you don't want to write about, you don't get upset.” (Hakan, phase 2)

"I think choosing is more better because you'll be prepared like cos if you write an autobiography you won't really know if you're just doing it for the first time you won't really know how to write it and you can work on doing more better if you can choose what you want to work on." (Elan, phase 2)

John and Elan's comments indicate the importance to the boys of having a choice, so that they can choose topics they are comfortable to write about and select a genre in which they are familiar. The boys' teachers also commented on the impact of choice on the boys' motivation to write, as illustrated below:

[all the children here] they haven't had the physical experiences of going out to places and experiencing all the difference senses that we experience ... and so we try to get them out and experience things ... we took them to the British Museum ... I just went on about that atmosphere and got them to write about going into this museum and it was empty and no-one was there and they could identify with that " (Y5 teacher (H&J), phase 2)

"You have to provide them with choices of the language so that they can pick ... *[so I say]*, "here are some phrases that you can use, choose the one you want"... on sentences so we've always got something like "oh you could use that sentence" and then *[they say]* "ah, I haven't got to think anymore I can just *pick*."" (Y5 teacher, (E), phase 2)

Although the Y5 teacher (H&J) did not mention giving the children choice, his comments indicated that he believed the children had limited choices of writing topics leading to his perception that they lacked experiences outside their homes, such as trips to museums. His comments also indicate he made assumptions about the children's experiences, viewing them through the lens of their socio-economic background, rather than as individuals whose experiences may have been different from his but may have provided an equally rich context for writing. Others have argued that where pupils and teachers did not share a common cultural group, this disadvantaged pupils whose achievements were not fully recognized by their teachers (Gipps, 1999). Nevertheless, other research has also shown that children from different socio-economic backgrounds do not have equal access to educational resources in their homes (Clark & Hawkins, 2010). The Y5 teacher (E) commented that she provided choice for the

children by giving them resources that contained phrases and sentences from which they could “pick” to include in their writing in order to encourage them to be more independent, but did not mention choice over genre for writing. However, her comments also reveal the extent to which she focused her teaching on the technical aspects of writing, and this is discussed more fully later in this Chapter.

Although none of the boys mentioned peer support in phase 2, they did in phases 1 and 3 as illustrated below:

“...I like to do teamwork with my groups or communicating ... and we did animations in teams.” (Uri, phase 1)

“When we work with a partner.” (Uri, phase 3)

“When you work in a big group and you can get ideas from other people.” (John, phase 3)

Uri and John's comments indicate that they enjoyed working with their classmates because they can talk about their writing and share ideas. I would suggest this has enabled the boys to have a greater sense of autonomy over their writing, as the Y5 teachers' comments below show:

“... and they have talk partners so they have a practice before they say it to me and before they have a go of writing it down... active writing, active listening ... makes the difference ... I can't listen to 25 children sitting there passively learning ... (Y5 teacher (E), phase 2)

The Y5 teacher (E) has integrated peer talk as part of her lessons in order to encourage the children to be more active in their learning and be less dependent on her, nevertheless, she had focused on talking about writing before writing rather than peer assessment, a focus preferred by her Y6 colleague, as shown in her comment below:

“... It's taken a really long time to get them to, um, feedback to partners and talk about improvements that is unrelated to their handwriting... if I was to take those boys back to Y4, I would spend a lot more time structuring it up so that peer feedback became

something natural that they do, as opposed to, “we’re in Y6 and we’re trying to fix all of these things”.” (Y6 teacher (H&J), phase 3)

The Y6 teacher is critical of her colleagues in Y4 and Y5 and blames them for not preparing the children to engage in giving and receiving feedback on their writing and has resulted in her spending more time than she would have wanted to do in teaching the children how to do this. Mercer (2000) argued that constructive talk with peers helped children to understand language, but that children needed to be taught the ground rules in order to engage effectively in peer talk. Although the Y5 teacher (E) was encouraging the children to talk about their writing, she did not mention teaching them to engage in peer assessment, a practice that was used in Y6. Although the Y6 teacher/LL(U) commented “We [*in Y6*] were looking at peer assessment afterwards but not talking about writing before...”, her comment refers to discussions she had with her Y6 colleagues, not with her colleagues in Y5. As a result, the Y5 teachers were unaware of the focus the Y6 teachers placed on peer assessment and this resulted in the boys being less prepared for the challenges of writing in Y6 than they might have been had the teachers collaborated to share practice. This finding resonates with the findings of Stoll & Fink (1996), that where there was a culture of teachers working together the school was more effective than where they worked in isolation. However, my findings have shown the particular importance of teacher collaboration between adjacent year groups, to share practice, so the teachers have a better understanding of the issues faced by their colleagues and how they could best adapt their practice to help the children make the transition into the next year, in particular, to help the boys to become more autonomous as writers.

In summary the misbehaviour of other children in the class and the difficulties the boys had with their handwriting, posed a barrier for the boys in terms of their ability to concentrate on their writing in the classroom. Nevertheless, the boys were more motivated to write when they were motivated by the writing activity, when they were writing from their own experience or when they were writing with their peers and in these circumstances were able to transcend their difficulties. Although the boys said their teachers intervened to discipline the children when they misbehaved in the class, the boys often felt they were disciplined more harshly than the girls and this led to them having a strong sense of injustice and feeling less valued members of the class. When the boys entered Y6 the teachers found the boys had difficulty working

independently, to write collaboratively with their peers and were unwilling to persevere to improve their writing. Although the Y6 teachers intervened to try to encourage the boys to take more control of their writing, such as through peer review, they found this difficult and blamed their colleagues for not preparing the boys for their entry into Y6, rather than talk about how they could collaborate with them to help to ease the transition for the boys in future.

The Brooktown boys' feelings about literacy

Gendered preferences for school subjects

Boys were asked the question "What do you like to do best at school?" Their responses are summarised below:

Table 6.8 The Brooktown boys' preferred school subjects				
	Hakan	Uri	Elan	John
phase 1	PE, ICT, DT & art	PE, playtime & maths	PE & ICT	PE, playtime, maths & ICT
phase 2	PE, ICT, DT, art & maths		PE & ICT	PE, maths, RE, art & DT
phase 3	Maths	Maths		Maths, PE & football

The data in the table above shows that, without exception, the boys preferred school subjects that required the least amount of literacy throughout the three phases of this study. Typical comments made by the boys are shown below:

"I like to do PE, playtime and maths ... I don't understand that much about geography ... geography stuff I can't understand the things that happened." (Uri, phase 1)

"I enjoy a number of subjects at school, for example DT, ICT, PE, art and maths, but it's literacy I'm worried about." (Hakan, phase 2)

"I like maths, dodgeball and PE and sometimes football as well ..." (John, phase 3)

These comments indicate the boys maintained a strong preference for subjects that placed the least demands on them in relation to literacy, such as maths and PE. Although Hakan was concerned about his progress in literacy in phase 2, none of the other boys mentioned difficulties with literacy, rather, literacy was just not a school subject they liked, or, wanted to admit they liked in front of their peers. Nevertheless, when talking about aspects of literacy they had enjoyed, such as creating their animated stories, as discussed earlier in this Chapter, the boys were all very positive about this experience. I would suggest the boys' rejection of literacy as a school subject in the context of a focus group discussion with their peers, as others have argued (Jackson D., 1998; Epstein, 1998; Martino, 1999), was related more to their desire to maintain their masculinity and reject subjects that related to their perception of femininity, than their dislike of all things related to literacy.

Beliefs about differential performance

Boys were asked the question "Do you think boys or girls do better in school or do you think they are about the same?" Their responses are summarised in the table below:

Table 6.9 The Brooktown boys' perceptions of girls' and boys' achievement				
	Hakan	Uri	Elan	John
phase 1	Girls behave better than boys	Behave equally well but girls get more opportunities	Work equally hard but girls get more opportunities	Girls work harder than boys
phase 2	Different in different subjects;		Equal behaviour	Girls are better at behaviour
phase 3	Different in different subjects; equal in behaviour	Different in different subjects; equal in behaviour		Different in different subjects; girls behave better

As can be seen from the table above, with the exception of Elan in phase 2, the boys had strongly gendered views about girls' and boys' behaviour in the classroom and their different abilities in school subjects, with boys behaving less well than girls and

being less good at literacy. Typical comments made by the boys in phases 1 and 2 are illustrated below:

“I think the boys and girls are both the same ... not fair [*the way teachers treat the boys*], but then the boys just misbehave ...” (Uri, phase 1)

“... I think they're both the same but sometimes if the girls, if the girls don't do their writing right if the boys can have like an opportunity to do good writing. (Elan, phase 1)

“I think girls are more better because most boys mess about and don't do their work.” (John, phase 2)

Although Uri and Elan did not see a difference between boys' and girls' behaviour in their classroom, they both thought boys had fewer opportunities than girls to do well. John's comment illustrated above is a comment he made throughout the three phases of this study, indicating that he strongly believed boys behaved less well than girls in his classrooms. In phase 3, Hakan and Uri initially said they thought girls and boys did equally well in school, but then John made a comment about differential achievement in literacy and maths, and this stimulated an interaction, as shown below:

“Girls do better at writing because boys like mostly maths and PE.” (John, phase 3)

“Why do you think that?” (*interviewer*)

“Cos they concentrate better and some of the boys just play around and don't do their writing.” (John, phase 3)

“I think that girls do better at writing cos boys really like maths and maths is like one answer to every question with writing there's so many answers it's much easier for the girls because the boys like ...” (Hakan, phase 3)

“I think the same as John and Hakan” (Uri, phase 3)

This interaction illustrated there was strong agreement amongst these three boys that girls and boys achieved differently in different school subjects and that their views were strongly gender gendered, with boys seen to be better at maths and PE and girls at writing. These findings agree with the findings of those who argued that boys' feelings about literacy were strongly influenced by gender stereotypes and in order to preserve their masculinity they rejected subjects they viewed as 'female' (Epstein,

1998; Jackson D., 1998; Martino, 1999). However, my findings have also shown that the teachers' views mirrored the boys' views, as their comments below illustrate:

“... er, boys tend to write about their sporting experiences ... girls tend to be a lot more adventurous I think and able to in fact pick up on less stimulus and still create things in their own way.” (Y5 teacher, H&J, phase 2)

“...a lot of them [*boys and girls*] don't read at home... Um I would imagine the girls probably read more. If you ask children to get a book out, it's more often that girls will go to their tray and get a book that they've brought from home ... which also says that they [*the boys*] probably don't like reading.... John, I think he doesn't like writing and I think that's because he is very mathematically minded and he, in his mind he finds it difficult that in maths it's right or wrong, in Literacy it doesn't matter what I do you tell me I could make it better. (Y6 teacher (H&J), phase 3)

The Y5 teacher (H&J) explained the children's ability in writing as a contrast between the boys and girls, with boys needing more “structure” than the girls and “stimulus” and having a restricted range of topics in which they were able to write, such as football and the Y6 teacher (H&J) who thought the boys read less than the girls. Nevertheless, neither of these teachers mentioned how they had tried to help the boys to encourage them to widen their reading repertoire, such as introducing them to books that would challenge gender stereotypes. Although these findings resonate with the findings of others (Jones & Myhill, 2004; Myhill & Jones, 2006) that teachers tended to judge boys and girls as undifferentiated groups, with girls outperforming boys, and that teachers had lower expectations of boys, my findings have also shown that where teachers also held strongly gendered of boys and girls, they were less likely to intervene to change things for the boys. The impact on this on the boys' performance as writers is illustrated in a comment made by the Y6 teacher/LL (U), as shown below:

“We've set the children this year for their writing and I've got the top set and there is only four boys in that set and so it's still the girls are achieving the higher levels.” (Y6 teacher/LL (U), phase 3)

This comment indicates the boys would have seen very few of their number in the top writing group and this would have served to reinforce their belief that girls

outperformed boys in literacy. I would suggest the teachers' lack of intervention to find out what the issues were for the boys or to work together as a team to identify how they could overcome these, has meant the position of the boys as underachieving less well in literacy than the girls remained largely unchanged as the boys progressed from Y4 to Y6.

In summary my findings have shown that, without exception the boys had strongly gendered preferences for school subjects that required the least amount of literacy, such as maths and PE. With the exception of Elan in phase 2, the boys also perceived that girls' outperformed them in their literacy classroom, in terms of their ability to conform to acceptable standards of behaviour and in their achievement in literacy. However, I have argued that the boys' beliefs were influenced by their daily experiences in the classroom, where their teachers expected the boys to do less well in literacy than the girls, reinforced for the boys in Y6 when a significantly low number of boys were selected for the top ability set in writing. This situation was further worsened where the teachers based their judgments of the children's ability on their socio-economic background rather than viewing the children as individuals. Although the teachers made some interventions to help the children with their literacy learning, their lack of intervention to identify the particular issues for the boys and to find ways to help them contributed to strengthening the boys' belief that girls' outperformed boys in literacy.

The Brooktown boys' feelings about writing

Boys were asked the question "Do you like writing?" A summary of their responses is shown in the table below:

Table 6.10 The Brooktown boys' feelings about writing				
	Hakan	Uri	Elan	John
phase 1	Likes writing; likes writing stories about dragons; liked creating animated stories	Likes writing because he believes he is good at it; liked creating animated stories	Only likes writing when it's short; liked creating animated stories	Likes writing a lot; liked creating animated stories
phase 2	Only likes writing stories if they include pictures		Only likes writing myths & legends stories	Only likes writing myths & legends stories
phase 3	Likes writing stories, dislikes news reports	Likes writing news reports, dislikes poems		Dislikes long writing because his hands hurt, likes writing about violence & war

The data in the table above shows that the boys were more positive about writing in phase 1 than they were in phases 2 and 3. Changes in the boys' feelings about writing as they progressed through the phases of this study, are illustrated in their comments shown below:

"I like writing cos I'm good at writing." (Uri, phase 1)

"I think about it like, I just like writing stories and if they have pictures inside them ... it kind of like makes it better and makes me happy and I get more focused. (Hakan, phase 2)

"Yeh, half and half ... because the bad half is sometimes it takes long and it hurts your hand when you're like writing two pages ... and the good part is you can write about what you want to write about the story ... I like war, pillaging, murdering and all that." (John, phase 3)

In phase 1 Uri's comment indicated he believed he was good at writing and this was also reflected in the comments made by the other boys in this phase, indicating they had strong self-belief. In phase 2 the boys were particularly negative about writing, as exemplified in Hakan's comment that he only liked writing when he could include pictures. In phase 3 Hakan and Uri were more ambivalent, citing genres they liked and those they did not like, and John was more negative, indicating he still had difficulty with aching hands and only liked writing about war and violence.

Difficulties with the technical aspects of writing

In phases 1 and 2 all the boys commented on the difficulties they had with the technical aspects of writing and with concentrating on their writing, particularly when there were distractions in the classroom. In phase 3, although the boys continued to comment on difficulties in concentrating on their writing, only John mentioned difficulties with handwriting. Typical comments the boys made are illustrated below:

“Well, I don't find writing very difficult, the only part that is difficult is when you like write too much and your hands start aching and when you get distracted by other people.” (Hakan, phase 1)

“The only thing that stops me from writing is um spelling ...” (Elan, phase 2)

“Because the bad half [*about writing*] is sometimes it takes long and it hurts your hand when you're like writing two pages” (John, phase 3)

These boys' comments indicate they were finding the technical aspects of writing difficult, particularly in phases 1 and 2 of this study, and as Hakan and John's comments indicate, were having particular difficulty with aching hands when they were required to write for longer periods of time, something they were increasingly required to do when they were in Y6. The extent of the boys' difficulties with handwriting, particularly in phase 1, were evident when I asked them what helped them with their writing and they initially responded with:

“When you have like, space between all the letters or dots on the page these can help you” (John, phase 1)

“I find it difficult when um there’s no guidelines [*for your handwriting*]” (Elan, phase 1)

John and Elan’s comments indicate they were having difficulty in forming their letters and keeping their writing aligned on a page and, I would suggest, these difficulties contributed to their aching hands, and these findings agree with Graves (1983), that placement of the writing paper, arm and wrist placement and pencil grip were important in avoiding aching muscles. Nevertheless, Graves also argued that if children were interested in the topic they would be motivated to write more regularly and would forget about their handwriting problems and this meshes with my findings. Typical comments made by the boys’ teachers are illustrated in the Y6 teacher (H&J)’s comment below:

“... Hakan is quite a challenging writer but he doesn’t like writing, he doesn’t like the mechanics of it, he’s got lots of ideas but he can’t get it down quick enough, er...” (Y6 teacher (H&J), phase 3)

Although this teacher’s comment indicated that Hakan did not like the mechanics of writing, this was not something that Hakan focused on when I interviewed him in phase 3 of this study. I would suggest these conflicting findings indicate that Hakan did still have difficulties with the technical aspects of writing, but that he was less concerned about it in this phase; because the genre approach to teaching writing adopted by his Y6 teacher had enabled him to see beyond the technical aspects of writing, to the meaning and purpose of writing.

Choice & genre

As shown in the table at the beginning of this section, with the exception of Elan in phase 1, who only liked writing when it was short, all the boys said they liked writing unconditionally, but in phases 2 and 3 they increasingly placed conditions on their liking of writing, such as, only liking writing when they were writing about certain topics in phase 2 or in particular genres in phase 3. The extent to which the boys

enjoyed their writing in phase 1 is illustrated in the prolonged interaction the boys had about a digital story they had created, as shown below:

“Er, well last two weeks we been making an animation about our happy feet and doing sole trader and you see we been doing storyboards and stuff and it was easier for us when it came to our animation.” (Hakan)

“We all do animations about ‘over the hedge’ we done our own characters with plasticine, we made like characters like Harry, RJ and like other characters in the story in the film.” (Uri)

“Did everyone in Y4 get to have a go at that?” (interviewer)

“Yeh, yes, yeh, Y3 and Y4” (All)

“All of the classes, yeh, one class, S.. class, never did it.” (Elan)

“Mine and Hakan’s class done one and your class.” (John)

“We done ‘over the hedge’.” (Elan)

“When you’d finished them, did you show them to anybody?” (interviewer)

“We haven’t finished ours yet.” (Hakan)

“We done it on the camera on the computer, the digital blue, and we took pictures of it so we showed our movie, yeh, and it showed, it should have took a picture of your hand and it filmed your hand and yeh, but when I was doing it our characters were doing a back flip and funny stuff.” (Uri)

“And when we did back flips, the dolls head fell off and then for the next week we done a bit more plasticine work and clay work because some people had to like sketch the playground and their favourite things in the playground and in the basketball court which was 3D and the football pitch.” (Elan)

This prolonged interaction between the boys, the longest they had in any of the three interviews I undertook with them, illustrates the extent to which they had all really enjoyed creating their digital stories. They had worked in teams to share ideas, used storyboards to plan their narrative, created physical characters for their stories from plasticine, sketched objects from real life to include as background for their stories, used digital blue cameras to film their characters and used computers to create a presentation of their story in the form of a movie. I would suggest this activity had relieved the boys of the burden of worrying about the mechanics of writing and enabled them to focus on the narrative and characters in their story. These findings agree with the work of other researchers who found that children were more motivated to engage with and sustain their writing when they were using computers (Cox, 1997,

Goldberg, et al, 2003, Passey, et al, 2004). However, the boys benefited from being taught in phase 1 by a number of different external subject experts, such as an ICT/literacy expert who led the teaching of the animated story project and I have argued that this had a significant influence on the boys' feelings about writing in this phase. Nevertheless, as discussed earlier in this Chapter, this experience served to highlight the contrast in the teaching expertise of their Y4 class teachers with that of highly skilled subject experts and contributed to the extremely negative comments the boys made about their class teachers in this phase.

In phase 2 the boys were particularly negative about writing, as illustrated in their comments below:

“... I can't remember [*the last thing I enjoyed writing*]” (Hakan, phase 2)

“...[*but I like*] the story I am writing now about Hercules and Zeus” (John, phase 2)

“I just love doing myths and legends ...” (Elan, phase 2)

Hakan's comment that he could not remember anything he had enjoyed in writing illustrates the extent of his unhappiness about writing in this phase. Although John and Elan said they had enjoyed writing about myths and legends, they did not mention any other writing they had enjoyed. The Y5 teacher (E), commented as shown below:

“... They are very much aware of the technical side of the language and which techniques to use for which genre of writing, say for explanation they've got set pieces that they know that this is what writers tend to use ... I think they've enjoyed the persuasion writing ... It was just literacy [*the national literacy strategy*], the genre that came. (Y5 teacher (E), phase 2)

The Y5 teacher (E) pointed out that the children were very aware of the technical side of the language and that they had 'set pieces' so they knew which techniques to use in different genres, indicating that her focus for teaching was on the technical aspects of language. I would suggest the heavy focus this teacher placed on the technical aspects of writing was the result of her using the NLS teaching programme to guide her teaching, a programme some have criticized for too heavy a focus on the technical

aspects of writing, at the expense of the meaning of the text (D'Arcy, 2000; Hilton, 2001; Andrews, 2005). Further, the Y5 teacher (E) commented that she did not deviate from the programme when she said "it was just literacy ... the genre that came" indicating she had little choice in what to teach the children and this chimes with the findings of those who argued that the programme provided reduced opportunities for teachers to have autonomy over the teaching of writing (Grainger, et al, 2003; Moss, 2007; Twiselton, 2007; Gibbons, 2008).

In phase 3, the boys focused their comments about writing on the genres they liked and those they did not like, as their comments below show:

"... sometimes it's a fun thing to do like you can do a little storyboard and make up a story or poem and it's actually quite fun but there is some other stuff that's quite boring ... I don't like doing news reports" (Hakan, phase 3)

"I like doing news reports but I don't like doing poems ... because it's hard to get a rap" (Uri, phase 3)

Hakan and Uri's comments indicate they both had different genre preferences, with Hakan indicating he preferred imaginative writing whereas Uri preferred factual writing. The boys' teachers commented on genre preferences as shown below:

"...um, I think it depends on the genre that you're doing ..." (Y6 teacher (H&J), phase 3)

"...I spoke to them [*the Y6 children*] about the kind of ways they like to learn and nothing new really, I think they find it quite prescriptive and not hugely interesting, it's lots of revision, and boom boom boom to get through the different genres, but having said that, I felt it was the SATs that was too much, but we didn't do them this year." (Y6 teacher/LL (U), phase 3)

The Y6 teacher (H&J) commented on the genre having an influence on children's feelings about writing, but did not expand further. However, the Y6 teacher/LL (U) commented that although she had consulted with the children about learning literacy at Brooktown, she was unable to adapt her teaching, such as making provision for them

to have more choice, because she was constrained by the requirements of the SATs tests, such as teaching children the “different genres”. Despite this, she said that the school made the decision not to report the results of the children’s SATs tests in 2010, but instead conducted teacher assessment. The reason for this was that Brooktown was one of the schools that boycotted the SATs tests in that year due to industrial action by the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and the National Association of Headteachers (NAHT), who were arguing for a system that “highlights what children can do rather than focusing on failure” (Shepherd, 2010). These findings highlight the constraints these Y6 teachers were under as a result of the high stakes nature of the Government SATs tests and the school involvement in the industrial action to boycott the tests, neither of which was in their power to change.

Stamina & longer writing tasks

As can be seen in the table at the beginning of this section, Elan in phase 1 and John in phase 3 linked their liking of writing to the length of the writing task, however, all the boys commented at some point in their three interviews with me on having difficulty with longer writing tasks, and the comments below were typical of those made by these boys:

“I like a little bit of writing because if I do too much writing my hands ache.” (Elan, phase 1)

“... if you are going to do a story it has to go on for a long time and it puts me off” (Hakan, phase 2)

“You won’t have time, right, for a long piece of writing, to finish it, and you finish it on like your break time or lunch time.” (Uri, phase 3)

“... The teachers stop you in a long piece of writing that you never get finished cos they keep stopping you and things like that.” (John, phase 3)

The boys’ comments above illustrate some of the difficulties they were having with longer pieces of writing, Elan suffered from aching hands, Hakan was demotivated and both Uri and John had difficulty completing their writing in the class time allocated by

their teacher. Although the length of the writing tasks increased as the boys moved from Y4 to Y6, and this could account for some of their comments about longer writing tasks, these findings also indicate that the boys were unprepared for the demands of the longer writing tasks expected of them as they prepared for their SATs tests towards the end of Y6.

“... um, I've gone through the process of asking them why it is that they're not writing and how can I help you and there's boys who I know who will sit there and muck around because in their mind “I just don't know what to write, I can't come up with any ideas ... They almost want someone sitting beside them as a group, when I think about all the boys, want someone to talk them through it rather than becoming an independent learner.” (Y6 teacher (H&J), phase 3)

“... the context is something that's important and that's something that you lose when you're doing revision for tests and you don't know what genre you're going to get so you've got to make sure you go through all of them and I think that's a large part of why they only write so much and then say, well that's it because is more of the same thing ...” (Y6 teacher/LL (U), phase 3)

Y6 Teacher (H&J) thought the boys had difficulty getting ideas for writing and that they were less able than the girls to write without the aid of their teacher. Nevertheless, the Y6 teacher/LL (U) thought the boys were reluctant to write at length because she was not able to choose the context and genre for writing, to help the boys to prepare for their SATs tests. I would suggest the comments of the boys throughout the three phases of this study indicate they had difficulty with longer pieces of writing and this was most evident in comments made by both the boys and their teachers in phase 3, indicating the boys were unprepared for the additional challenges of writing, particularly writing at length and writing independently, at an important time for them when they were preparing for their SATs tests.

In summary, in phase 1 of this study the boys were more positive about writing and had stronger self-belief than they did in phases 2 and 3. I have suggested that a significant factor influencing the boys' feelings about writing in phase 1 was the teaching of external experts who used a wide range of strategies to motivate the boys to write and enabled the boys to see beyond the technical aspects of writing. However,

my findings have also shown that the class teachers had less autonomy over the teaching of writing as a result of the constraints of the NLS teaching programme and SATs testing. In these conditions the boys were given fewer opportunities to have autonomy over their writing and as a result were less able to write independently, and less able to sustain their writing, at a critical time when they were preparing for their SATs tests.

Conclusion & Discussion

In conclusion, my interviews with the four boys in Brooktown in phase 1 and three in phases 2 and 3 respectively, indicated they were more positive about writing in phase 1 than they were in phases 2 and 3. The changes in the boys' attitude were reflected in Uri's comments where he stated in phase 1 "I like writing cos I'm good at writing ... I like doing reports, er, stories, poems and rhymes and raps ... and we all do animations." to his comments in phase 3 where he stated "Half and half... I like doing news reports but I don't like doing poems". Nevertheless, these comments masked other issues the boys faced in settling down to and sustaining their writing in the classroom in all three phases of this study. Most importantly, I have shown that where teachers viewed the boys through the lens of their socio-economic background and their gender, rather than as individuals, this had a significant influence on the climate in the classroom and on the way the boys felt about themselves as writers.

My findings support the findings of those who argued that the focus on boys' underachievement in the debate has served to mask issues such as girls who are struggling (Jackson, D, 1998; Jones & Myhill, 2004; Francis & Skelton, 2005) and drawn attention away from other issues that affect children's performance, such as poverty, race, ethnicity and sexuality and the kinds of pedagogy that can help all children to improve (Martino, 2008; Lingard, et al, 2009; Watson, et al, 2010). Additionally, my findings agree with others that where there was a conflict between home and school experiences, children found it more difficult to adapt and make progress in their literacy learning (Heath, 1982; Kress, 1994) and contributed to teachers' misjudgments of children's abilities (Kress, 1994; Gipps, 1999; Paechter, 2007). However, my findings have shown that where teachers held both gender and

socio-economic stereotypical beliefs they did not see the boys as individuals. Rather the teachers' thought that the boys as a group underachieved in writing in comparison to the girls, that none of the boys' families were able to provide literacy support at home, and they did not intervene to change this situation. As a result, as the boys progressed from Y4 to Y6, their situation deteriorated, as did their sense of injustice and disaffection in their literacy classroom.

The boys were more positive about writing and had stronger self-belief in phase 1, where they were taught by external subject experts who used a wide range of strategies to motivate the boys and engage them with their writing, such as the use of storyboards to plan writing, computers to write, cameras to photograph their story characters and teamwork for the joint creation of animated stories. However, the boys were least positive where their teachers used only a narrower range of strategies to motivate the boys, rarely gave them the opportunity to choose their topic or genre for writing, focused heavily on the technical aspects of writing at the expense of content and purpose and did not adapt the NLS teaching programme to meet the individual needs of the children. In these conditions the boys: lacked autonomy over their writing; were heavily dependent on their teachers; were anxious about their difficulties with the technical aspects of writing, particularly their handwriting, and found it difficult to concentrate on their writing. Nevertheless, my findings have also shown that the teachers themselves felt they had little choice over what to teach or how to teach as a result of the constraints of the NLS teaching programme and SATs testing. This concurs with the research of others, that the NLS programme provided fewer opportunities for teachers to have autonomy over their teaching (Grainger, et al, 2003; Moss, 2007; Twiselton, 2007; Gibbons, 2008). Additionally, my findings have shown that individual teachers' autonomy was further eroded as a result of industrial action by the National Union of Teachers and their school's decision to boycott the SATs tests in 2010, leaving teachers in a dilemma about their approach to teaching and assessment at a critical time for the boys in Y6.

The boys' strongly believed that the girls were superior to them in their writing ability and in their ability to conform to acceptable standards of behaviour in the classroom. These beliefs were also shared by their teachers, who thought the boys, read fewer fiction books, required more structure for writing, had a only limited range of topics to

write about and struggled to settle down to their writing in the classroom in contrast to the girls who were viewed as wide readers and more independent writers. I would suggest the daily interactions the boys had with their teachers in the classroom contributed to the boys' strongly gendered views, and this was further reinforced by their seeing so few of their number in the top writing set. The latter was evident in a comment made by the Y6 teacher " ... there is only four boys in that *[top writing]* set and so it's still the girls are achieving the higher levels ..." (Y6 teacher (U)/LL). But the comment was made without any explanation about how the school was planning to address this situation, to try to improve things for the boys, reflecting a culture in the school of "this is the way things are here".

The issue of the misbehaviour of other children in the class was raised by the boys in each of the three phases of this study and worsened as they progressed towards Y6, reflecting the children's growing alienation from their classroom. In these conditions the boys had difficulty concentrating on their writing, sustaining their writing and writing independently, most noticeable in Y6 where the boys were faced with more challenging and longer writing tasks. I have argued that where the teachers viewed the children through the lens of their socio-economic background and their gender, this masked their ability to see them as individuals with different strengths and weaknesses and resulted in lower expectations of all the children, particularly the boys. Although the culturally diverse backgrounds of the children presented a significant challenge to the teaching of literacy in Brooktown, rather than capitalize on this diversity, such as using the children's own cultural experiences as a springboard for writing activities, the teachers held a deficit view of the language the children spoke with their families, typified in comments such as: "... if you don't have a language rich background, coming to school ... sentence structure they *[all]* find difficult ..." (Y5 teacher (E)). The teachers saw the children's families as part of the problem, rather than a potential part of the solution and this meant they did not consider intervening, such as to engage the families in a dialogue about their boys' literacy learning at home. As a result, the boys' felt alienated in their literacy classroom and their families were either unsure whether they needed to help their boys, in the case of Uri and John, or how best to help them, in the case of Hakan and Elan.

Finally, the boys had more positive attitudes to writing when their teachers used a wide range of strategies to motivate them, such as the use of computers, peer partners to talk about their writing and storyboards to plan their stories and where the boys could see the meaning and purpose of their writing. However, most significantly, my findings have shown that where the teachers saw the children through the lens of their socio-economic background and their gender rather than as individuals, blamed the boys or their families for the boys' difficulties, this reduced their expectations of what the boys could achieve in literacy and the extent of the interventions they made to improve the situation, such as: engaging in a dialogue with the boys to find out their feelings; encouraging the boys' families to get engaged in their boys literacy learning and collaborating with colleagues to critically reflect on practice and share ideas about how to improve practice. Although I did not have access to the individual boys' performance in literacy and writing, my findings have shown that in the classroom conditions reported in this Chapter, the boys held strongly gendered beliefs about boys and girls as literacy learners, had a strong sense of inequity in the classroom, lacked self-belief and found it difficult to sustain their writing. However, comments made by the Y6 teacher and literacy leader indicated that in Brooktown, boys were underperforming in comparison to girls, with only four boys in the top writing set.

I now move on to discuss this and my other main findings in the next Chapter 7, Main Findings.

CHAPTER 7

MAIN FINDINGS

Introduction

This Chapter provides a discussion of the main findings from each of the three phases of my study exploring the influences on boys' attitude towards writing. This study consisted of focus group interviews with small groups of boys and separate individual interviews with their teachers annually over a three-year period. The interviews took place in three schools that I have called Somerview, Estateside and Brooktown. My analysis of the data collected each year revealed eight categories (see Findings: Somerview, Chapter 4 of this thesis), that I used to discuss my findings and from which four key themes emerged in relation to the influences on boys' attitude to writing and their response to writing in the classroom. These themes were:

- gender and socio-economic beliefs;
- expectations;
- self-belief;
- pedagogy.

These themes fed into my main findings that gender and socio-economic stereotyping had a negative effect on boys' self-belief and their attitudes towards writing, but that this was not static, and was subject to change when the conditions in which the boys were learning in their classroom changed. My findings have shown the centrality of the classroom teacher in creating a climate for learning where the boys could thrive as writers and the importance of a holistic approach to the teaching of writing. My findings also emphasise the importance of high expectations and a shared responsibility between the teachers in the school for the boys' development as writers, and the vital role of the families in encouraging and supporting the boys to write at home, a combination of which I have shown strengthens the boys' identity as writers. These findings are illustrated schematically in three figures, 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3 in this

Chapter. The diagrams are supported by a discussion, where I draw on data from my own study to illustrate my findings, and from the research of others to highlight points of agreement or difference.

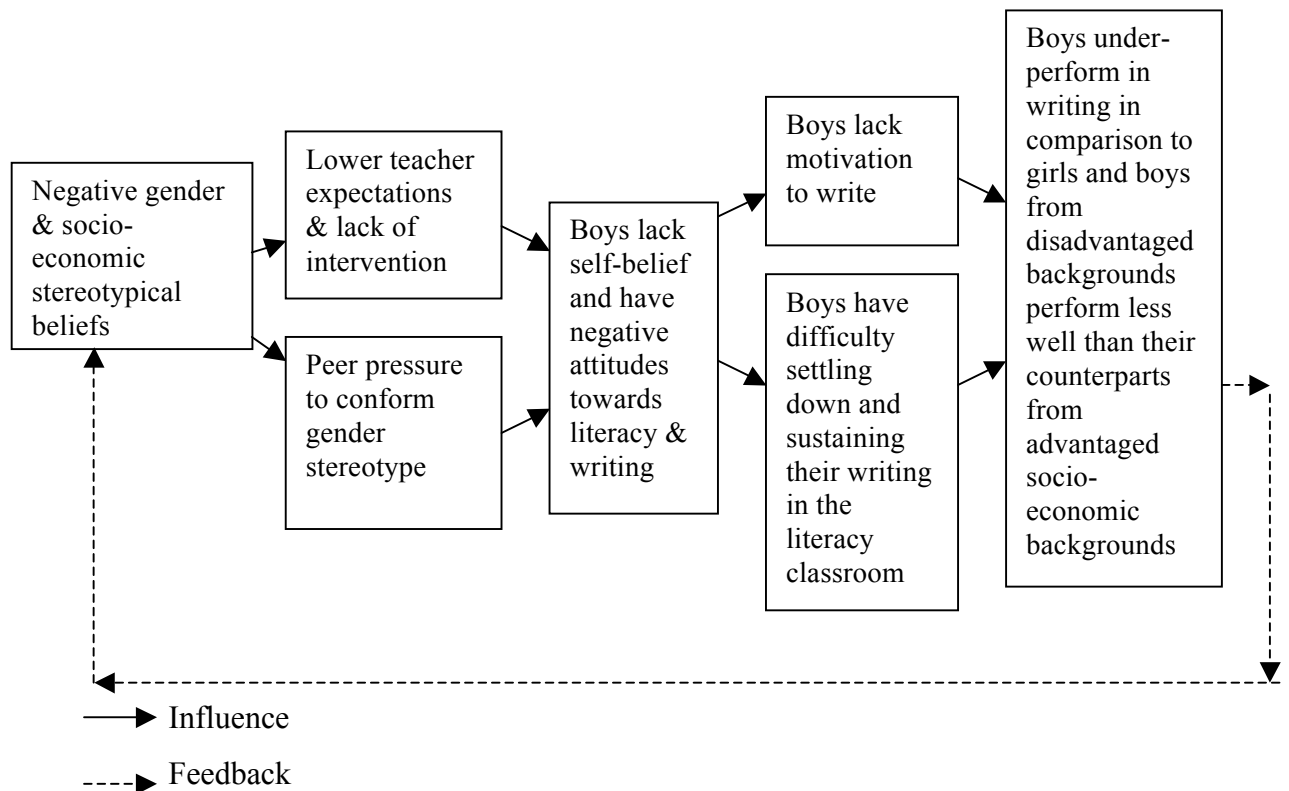
Although my findings are based on a very small sample of data from boys and their teachers in the three schools in my study, I have been able to derive five theoretically significant propositions from my data and these are listed towards the end of this Chapter, with fuller details of data sources and evidence given in Appendix 6 of this thesis.

Stereotypical beliefs related to gender and socio-economic issues

The findings from each of the three phases of my study have indicated that where teachers held gender and/or socio-economic stereotypical beliefs (where boys were believed to be less good at writing than girls and boys from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds were expected to do less well in writing than their counterparts from advantaged socio-economic backgrounds) this negatively influenced their expectations of what the boys could achieve in literacy and contributed to undermining the boys' self-belief and reinforcing their belief that girls outperformed them in their literacy classroom. These findings concur with the findings of others, that gender stereotypical beliefs lowered teachers' expectations of boys (Jones & Myhill, 2004; Jones & Myhill, 2007), that teachers often misjudged children based on their socio-economic background (Kress, 1994; Gipps, 1999), and that boys exerted pressure on each other to conform to the gender stereotype (Epstein, 1998; Jackson, D. 1998; Martino, 1999), but my findings have shown the conditions in which this happened and the significance of a combination of both gender and socio-economic stereotyping on the boys' performance as writers. Although my findings reflect the data on children's performance in England in school tests in primary and secondary schools showing boys have consistently performed less well than girls in literacy, and boys from disadvantaged socio-economic family backgrounds performed less well than boys from advantaged socio-economic families (Twist, et al, 2007; DfES, 2007), my findings have shown how both gender and socio-economic stereotyping have significantly inhibited the literacy development of boys from disadvantaged socio-

economic backgrounds. These findings are illustrated in the schematic diagram below:

Figure 7.1. Negative influences on boys' attitudes towards writing



However, most significantly my findings have shown that this situation was not static and that it changed when the boys' experienced different climates for learning, most importantly where teachers: viewed the boys as individuals, listened to their concerns and respected their ideas and trusted them to have autonomy over their writing; collaborated with colleagues to review practice and share ideas; and engaged in a dialogue with the boys' families to ensure the families knew how to best help their boys (see Figs 7.2 and 7.3 and discussion later in this Chapter).

I now turn to a discussion of the impact of low teacher expectations on the boys' self-belief and attitude to writing.

Low expectations

With the exception of the Y5 and Y6 teachers in Somerview, and the Y5 Brooktown teacher (E), the other teachers I interviewed held strongly gendered beliefs about boys as literacy learners, with boys seen as a homogeneous group who were “less willing” (Y4 Somerview teacher), “less able to go into detail” (Y5 Estateside teacher) and were “single minded” (Y6 Brooktown teacher/LL), in contrast to the girls who were seen to be outperforming the boys in all aspects of writing. The boys also held similar views about themselves as underperforming in contrast to the girls, who they thought could “do stuff more kind of like handwriting, literacy” (Joel, Y4 Somerview), “write faster than boys” (Cal, Y4, Estateside), and were “good at behaviour” (Hakan, Brooktown, Y4). Although, when the boys were in Y4, there were some boys who did not hold these views, there were distinct trends in the changes in their views in the three schools as they progressed through Y5 and Y6, where, with the exception of Joel in Y6, the Somerview boys thought girls and boys did equally well in school subjects, whereas in Estateside and Brooktown they did not and related this to the preferential treatment they thought girls received (see ‘Differential performance’ and ‘Fairness’ in summary tables 4.1, 5.1 and 6.1 in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 of this thesis on p119, p159, p200).

An explanation for the contrasts in the way the boys in the three schools perceived themselves as literacy learners emerged in relation to the way the teachers viewed the boys, and in the extent to which they intervened to address gender issues in their classrooms. In my interviews with the Y5 and Y6 Somerview teachers, they talked about the boys as individuals, rather than as a gendered group with similar characteristics. These two teachers were also proactive in consulting with the boys to both find out what the issues were, such as their over-concern with handwriting and addressing these issues by adapting their practice. The Y6 teacher was also aware that the boys needed to widen their reading repertoire and intervened to introduce them to books that challenged gender stereotypes (see discussions in Chapter 4, Findings: Somerview, pp 125,126 and 130). The sensitive and proactive approach of the Y5 and Y6 Somerview teachers, contrasted starkly with the passive approach adopted by the teachers in Estateside and Brooktown, who either did not consult with the boys to find out what the issues were, or if they did they did not act on their findings and this

contributed to the boys' growing sense of frustration, evident in Jack's comment in Y6 in Estateside, where he said "I think we should set it into an actual debate into the classroom so we can sort out our problems [*between the boys and the girls*]" (see discussions in Findings:Estateside Chapter 5, p164 and Brooktown, p229). Without a language to challenge gender stereotypes, the Estateside and Brooktown boys exerted influence on each other to reinforce the gender stereotype, such as the Estateside boys' negative reactions to Ian's comment in Y5 about writing a diary at home and the strong agreement between Hakan, John and Uri in Brooktown in Y6 about their perception of girls' superior performance as writers (see interactions between the boys in Findings:Estateside, Chapter 5, p166 and Brooktown Chapter 6, p221).

My findings concur with the research of others that beliefs about gender influenced teachers' expectations of what children could do (Jones & Myhill, 2004; Jones & Myhill, 2007) and how they assessed and judged the children's work (Gipps, 1999; Elwood, 2006) and that teachers often failed to take account of the complex needs of individuals (Jones & Myhill, 2004), and that the focus should be on which boys and which girls (Martino, 2008; Lingard, et al, 2009). However, my findings have also shown that gendered beliefs also influenced the extent of intervention the teachers made and that where teachers did not intervene to challenge gender stereotypes, the boys' gendered beliefs about girls and boys as literacy learners became stronger over time, as they progressed from Y4 to Y6 in their schools.

This situation was further exacerbated for some of the boys where they were learning in schools where there were a larger proportion of pupils from more disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, as in Estateside and Brooktown, and where their teachers viewed the children through the lens of their socio-economic background rather than as individuals. These teachers tended to blame the language the boys' spoke in their homes for their difficulties with writing, rather than what they could do to encourage the families to contribute to their boys' literacy learning. Although the Y5 teacher (E) in Brooktown did intervene to a certain extent to try to help the children, such as by the introduction of prompt cards in the classroom, and the Y6 teacher in Estateside sent books home with the boys to read with their families, neither of these teachers talked about how they differentiated their interventions to meet the needs of individual children, or the individual needs of the families. Rather, they

judged all the children and their families based on a deficit view of the language the children used in their homes, evident in comments made by the Y5 teacher (E) in Brooktown who said the children “don’t have a language rich background” and the Y6 Estateside teacher said the children lacked “positive role models” in their homes. Nevertheless, my findings showed that some of the families were keen to help their boys with their literacy learning such as Hakan’s family in Brooktown and Jack’s family in Estateside, but were unsure how best to help them as a result of a lack of regular dialogue with the boys’ teachers (a fuller discussion of this is given later in this Chapter). As a result of the lack of intervention, the boys did not develop the habit of writing at home and school and, I have argued, this hampered the boys’ ability to sustain their writing, particularly in Y6 where they were faced with increasingly challenging writing tasks. I now turn to a discussion of the impact of low expectations on the boys’ self-belief.

Lack of self-belief

In the conditions described above, the Estateside and Brooktown boys lacked self-belief and when faced with difficulties in their writing, they tended to give up and blame others, rather than persevere to overcome their difficulties. Cal in Estateside in Y6 thought the boys were treated unfairly by their teachers and that this “frustrated the boys so they do less work” and John in Y6 in Brooktown blamed the teachers who he said “stop you in a long piece of writing that you never get finished”. Although these comments reflect the boys continuing concerns with unresolved issues, such as the difficult relationships the boys in Estateside had with the girls, and the distractions caused by misbehaviour of children in Brooktown, they also reflect that the boys were in the habit of giving up when faced with difficulties and had not learned to sustain their writing, at a critical time for them in Y6 when they were presented with more demanding writing tasks. Similarly, the boys’ teachers also blamed others for the difficulties the boys had in sustaining their writing. The Y6 Estateside teacher, who was also the literacy leader, blamed his colleagues in the school for not adequately preparing the boys to write in the wide range of genres expected in Y6 when he said: “from Y1 where they start looking at the different genres and every year if they’re re-visiting” rather than commenting on what he could do to help his colleagues. Although the Y6 Brooktown teacher/LL did talk to the boys about their difficulties and

was aware they were unhappy with their contexts for writing, rather than talk about how she had adapted her teaching she dismissed the boys comments and blamed the SATs tests, when she said: “you lose [*the context*] when you’re doing revision for tests”. Although the NLS teaching programme and SATs testing did place restrictions on teachers’ autonomy over their literacy teaching, as discussed later in this Chapter, I have argued the lack of action on the part of the teachers to consult with the boys to better understand the nature and consequences of the issues they faced or to adapt their practice to address these, contributed to the boys’ continuing lack of self-belief and difficulty in sustaining their writing in Y6.

By contrast, with the exception of Owen in Somerview and to a lesser extent Richard, the other Somerview boys did not have difficulty with sustaining their writing when they were in Y6, where Joel said: “I don’t not mind long pieces of writing” and Tim said: “I like to make my story long and interesting”. Similarly, the Y6 Somerview teacher thought the boys were well prepared to face the increased range, complexity and length of the writing tasks. Nevertheless, she was aware of the daunting nature of the SATs tests, but rather than blame the tests on the boys’ difficulties, she encouraged the boys to think positively by saying to them “you’re worth it ... show what you can do”.

Although my findings agree with the research of Bandura (1977), that people who had weak self-belief were less able to persevere with tasks they found difficult and too often focused on their failings, rather than how to undertake a task, and with Dweck (2000) that children’s response to learning is not fixed and that with effort and guidance, they can develop a response to learning where they value effort and are able to persist in the face of difficulties, my findings have also highlighted the significance of this in the context of this group of boys’ learning to write in their primary school classrooms.

I now turn to a discussion of the pedagogical practices that either locked the boys into a spiral of decline or moved them on an upward spiral of continuous improvement.

Biased pedagogy

My data have shown that the teachers I interviewed from the three schools in my study created very different climates for learning in their classrooms and that these had a significant impact on the boys' response to their literacy learning. Where the boys: did not feel valued by their teachers; were not trusted to have autonomy over their writing; were taught using a technical approach to writing and where the teachers had little or no dialogue with the boys themselves, their colleagues or the boys families about their literacy learning, the boys had low self-belief and responded more negatively to their literacy learning in the classroom (this scenario is illustrated in Fig. 7.2 below). By contrast, where the boys felt valued by their teachers, trusted to have autonomy over their writing, were given writing activities that had meaning and purpose, and where the teachers had a regular dialogue with each other, with the boys themselves and their families about their literacy learning, the boys had stronger self-belief and responded more positively to writing in their classrooms (this scenario is illustrated in Fig. 7.3 below).

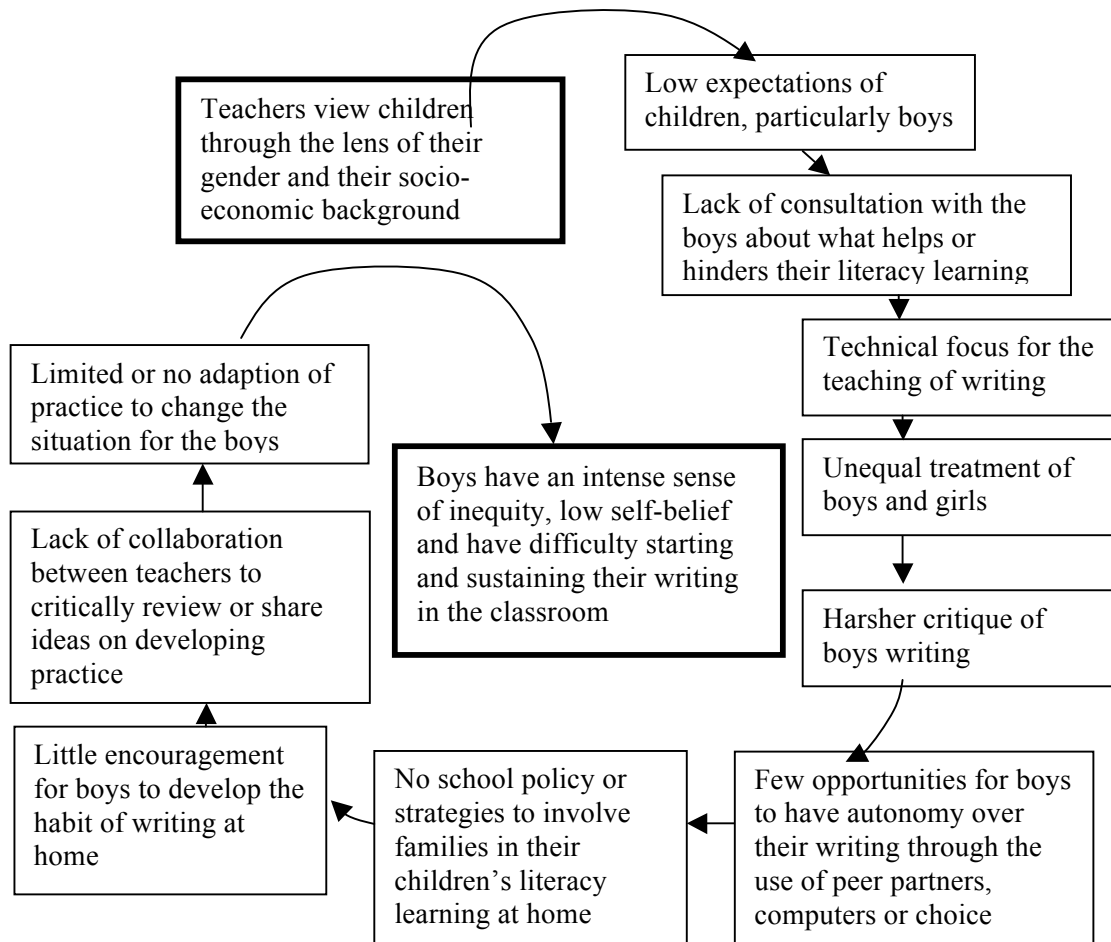
I have presented these two scenarios below, in the form of upward and downward spirals, rather than a linear process, in order to emphasise that this is a continuum, where the boys can move up or down depending on the classroom climate in which they were learning.

I will now move on to a discussion of the factors that contributed to a downward learning spiral.

Downward learning spiral

The *downward learning spiral*, that emerged from the data, illustrates the pedagogical practices in the school and classroom that had a negative effect on the way the boys responded to writing in the classroom and this is shown below:

Fig. 7.2. A downward learning spiral



I now move on to a discussion of the pedagogical practices illustrated in the *downward learning spiral* shown above.

My interviews with the Somerview boys in Y4 and the boys in Estateside and Brooktown in Y4 to Y6, showed they had a strong sense of inequity, as illustrated in their comments below:

“... teachers ... comes up to me and just goes ooh that’s really titchy writing ... and a girl can be the same ... *[but is not criticised]*” (Tim Somerview, phase 1)

“... I think that um girls do better at school cos they get an easier time ...” (Jack, Estateside, phase 2)

“They treat girls better ... I think it’s wrong really. (Hakan, Brooktown, phase 3)

Tim thinks that boys receive harsher judgement on their writing than girls, Jack believes girls do better because they have more opportunities to do well and Hakan thinks the fairer treatment girls receive is unjust. Although the Estateside and Brooktown boys' sense of inequity in the classroom strengthened as they progressed from Y4 to Y6, this was not the case with the Somerview boys who had a strong sense of equity in Y5 and Y6, where they thought the girls and boys were treated equally by their Y5 and Y6 teachers (see 'Fairness' in summary tables 4.1, 5.1 and 6.1 in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 of this thesis). These findings agree with the findings of others that boys were treated more harshly by their teachers than girls (Holden, 2002, Myhill & Jones, 2006, Alexander & Hargreaves, 2007) and of the need to address social justice in the classroom and the gender stereotypes that underpinned those inequities (Myhill & Jones, 2006) and that the focus should be on which boys or girls require help and what kind of help educators can provide (Martino, 2008; Lingard, et al, 2009; Watson, et al, 2010). Although the Estateside boys thought they were treated fairly by their main Y6 teacher, inconsistency in the practice of other staff in the school contributed to undermining any benefits to the boys' self-belief. My findings have shown that where the teachers worked in isolation from their colleagues, as did the Y4 Somerview teacher and the teachers in Estateside and Brooktown, and where they had little or no dialogue with the boys about the difficulties they faced, they were less aware of the impact of gender stereotyping and their role in this, and lacked knowledge of the range of strategies they could use to address this. As a result, unlike the Y5 and Y6 Somerview boys, the Estateside and Brooktown boys' sense of inequity strengthened as they progressed from Y4 to Y6, as did their sense of alienation from their literacy classroom.

In these conditions there were relationship issues between the children in the class, particularly between the boys and the girls, a lack of trust between the teachers and the boys and this resulted in the boys being given fewer opportunities to have autonomy over their writing, such as through the use of peer partners for writing. Although many of the boys commented they liked being able to write with their peers (see summary tables 4.1, 5.1 and 6.1 in Chapters, 4, 5 and 6 of this thesis), where they were unsure how to engage effectively in peer writing, as they were in Somerview in phase 1, or where there were unresolved behavioural issues and a lack of trust between the boys

and their teachers, as existed in Estateside and Brooktown, peer writing was less effective than it might have been, as the boys' comments below illustrate:

"Is it like [*when you're writing with peers*] you're getting bossed around and say like they can't have all the ideas and when they don't, then they say nothing." (Joel, Somerview, phase 1)

"I think the teachers don't trust the boys because they like trust the girls more than the boys and like I think they should like trust the boys the same as the girls." (Cal, Estateside, phase 2)

"When you work in a big group and you can get ideas from other people.... When people are shouting ... they [*teachers*] always tell you off for something you didn't do." (John, Brooktown, phase 3)

Although Joel from Somerview indicates that there were issues in the way the children interacted with each other when they were writing together, this was not the case for the boys when they were in Y5 and Y6. Contrastingly, for the Estateside and Brooktown boys, there was little or no change in their circumstances. The increasingly violent interactions taking place between the boys and girls in Estateside, where trust had broken down between the boys and their teachers, and in Brooktown the deterioration in behaviour of the children, posed a significant barrier to effective peer talk and peer review. Further explanations for the lack of effective peer writing in Estateside and Brooktown was evident in comments made by the Y6 teachers, as illustrated below:

"... we're also giving them the opportunities to improve their writing and responding to it ... we've just introduced a new marking and assessment procedure ..." (Y6 Estateside teacher, phase 3)

"... It's taken a really long time to get them to, um, feedback to partners ... if I was to take those boys back to Y4, I would spend a lot more time structuring it up so that peer feedback became something natural that they do ... when I think about all the boys, want someone to talk them through it [*their writing*] rather than becoming an independent learner." (Y6 Brooktown teacher (H&J), phase 3)

These teachers' comments indicate the boys had little experience of engaging in peer review until they reached Y6, and, as the Brooktown teacher has indicated, this has resulted in the boys being more dependent on their teacher for feedback on their writing than she expected them to be in Y6. The Brooktown teacher's comment also indicates that there was a lack of dialogue between the teachers to share literacy practice, as she blames her colleagues for not including peer review as one of their teaching strategies prior to Y6, and this chimes with the findings of others, that where teachers did not collaborate to share practice there was a tendency to blame others when they were faced with difficulties (Stoll & Fink, 1996). Although my findings agree with the findings of Mercer (2000) that for children to engage in group-talk they need to be taught the ground rules, and that this is particularly important for children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds who may not have the same level of language support from their families as their more advantaged peers; my findings have also shown that where the boys were not taught these ground rules prior to Y6, this had a negative impact on the boys' ability to write independently of their teachers, at a critical time for them when they were in Y6.

My findings have shown that the Somerview boys in phase 1, and the Estateside and Brooktown boys in phases 1 and 2, were over-concerned with the technical aspects of writing (spelling, grammar, punctuation and handwriting), and this masked their ability to see the meaning and purpose in their writing. This was evident in the comments made by the boys, as illustrated below:

“... when I'm writing I find it hard to write sometimes but I find it difficult to use grammar and punctuation and um joining up ... I'm not so good at handwriting”
(Owen, Somerview, phase 1)

“I like writing because I get used to my spellings and that's why I got a good certificate at home about my spellings because I passed all my Y5 and Y6 spellings.”
(Hakan, Brooktown, phase 1)

“... punctuation ... and full stops and capital letters and I find it hard when I'm tired and just not thinking and it's getting hard.” Kelvin, Estateside, phase 2)

The boys' over-concern with the technical aspects indicated they viewed writing as a set of technical skills to be learned and as such had a mechanistic view of writing. This finding chimes with the findings of Warrington & Younger (2006) that boys had a restricted view of writing. An explanation for the boys' concern with the technical aspects of writing was evident in comments made by their teachers, as illustrated below:

“... in Y4 we're giving them all the skills they need...” (Y4 Somerview teacher, phase 1)

“... I've got a group of girls, high achieving girls, and ... they're very much “must get my similes in, must get my alliteration in” ... the other general problem [*with all the children*] is punctuation ... ” (Y5 Estateside teacher, phase 2)

“... sentence structure they find difficult in terms of connectives, using noun clauses and knowing where to put the full stop... noun clauses, noun phrases... They are very much aware of the technical side of the language ... it was just literacy [*National Literacy Strategy*], the genre that came.” (Y5, Brooktown teacher (E), phase 2)

Both these comments indicate the teachers were very concerned with the technical aspects of writing, as were the children. An explanation for this is illustrated in the Brooktown teacher's comment indicating she is closely following the NLS teaching programme. Although my findings chime with the findings of those who have argued the NLS teaching programme is too heavily focused on the technical aspects of language (Grainger, et al, 2003; Turvey, 2007; Tymms & Merrell, 2007; Moss, 2007) and that there were fewer opportunities for teachers and children to have autonomy over the teaching and learning of writing (Grainger, et al, 2003; Moss, 2007; Twiselton, 2007; Tymms & Merrell, 2007; Gibbons, 2008); my findings have shown that some teachers were able to adapt the NLS teaching programme, and this is discussed more fully in the context of the upward learning spiral later in this Chapter.

However, my interviews with the boys and their teachers also showed that when the boys were using computers for writing, they were less concerned with the technical aspects of writing, as their comments below show:

“The Q1s have taken away their anxiety about writing, handwriting and spelling ...”
(Y5 teacher, Estateside phase 2)

“... we all [*all the classes*] do animations about ‘over the hedge’ ... we made like characters like Harry, RJ and like other characters in the story in the film ... we done it on the camera on the computer ... ” (Uri, Brooktown, phase 1)

The Estateside teacher indicates the boys were less worried about handwriting and spelling and Uri from Brooktown's comment indicates he was more able to focus on the characters and narrative for his story when he was using a computer for writing. Nevertheless, my findings have also shown that children in different schools did not have equal access in their classroom to computers for writing, as illustrated in their comments below:

“Well before we had to waste time going down to the computer suite ... and like now we just have to get them [*the Q1 hand-held computers*] and it's like one minute.
(Kelvin, Estateside, phase 2)

“... we are always doing ICT on Thursdays it's always the girls that can go on the computer first and then it's the boys. (Elan, Brooktown, phase 2)

In Estateside the boys had access to their own personal hand-held computers, to use whenever they needed to in their literacy classroom and at home, and this motivated them to write, whereas the Brooktown boys only had access to computers once a week in a computer suite. Given my findings have shown, as others have found, that children were more motivated to write when they were using computers (Cox, 1997; Goldberg, et al, 2003; Passey et al, 2004), and that children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds have less access to literacy and computing resources (Clark & Hawkins, 2010), I would suggest the lack of computer resources in Brooktown was a particularly significant lost opportunity to motivate these boys to write.

My data have shown that in Estateside and Brooktown, where the teachers did not have a method to engage in a regular dialogue with the boys' families, they were less

engaged with the boys' literacy learning at home (see 'Parental support' in summary tables 5.1 and 6.1 in Chapters, 5 and 6 of this thesis. An explanation for the lack of dialogue between the boys' teachers and their families, was evident in the comments made by their teachers, as illustrated below:

“... I also feel that it's part of the kind of social ... and cultural, whether or not, the boys say for example, their role models, positive role models were actually writers or readers, ... (Y6 teacher, Estateside, phase 3)

“... a lot of the children have English as a second language and so if they're not speaking the language as it's expected here, then they find that *[grammar]* difficult.”
(Y6 teacher/LL (U), Brooktown, phase 3)

The Estateside and Brooktown teachers indicate they have judged the language all the boys speak in their homes with their families as deficient, rather than judge the children as individuals, from families with different levels of expertise in either their own language or the English language. Nevertheless, my findings have shown that some of the boys' families were keen to help their boys to develop their literacy learning at home, such as Jack in Estateside and Hakan and Elan in Brooktown, but that the lack of a regular dialogue with the boys' teachers meant the families were less sure how to best help their boys. Although my interviews with the boys and their teachers in Brooktown indicated there had not been any intervention to engage the families in the boys' literacy learning, this was not the case in Estateside, where the Y6 teacher had initiated a home reading scheme. Despite the boys comments that, with the exception of Cal's family, the other five boys families had helped them with their literacy learning in Y6, the Y6 teacher judged the intervention to be unsuccessful when he said: “... some *[the books]* never came back ... the children really have to buy in ... “. This indicates the teacher did not have an effective dialogue with the families, because if he had, he would have been able to see that the families were more engaged in the boys' literacy learning than they had been in Y4 and Y5. Furthermore, his comment indicates he had given up and accepted that 'this is the way things are here', rather than seek to change the situation for the boys and this was consistent with the comments made by his colleague in Estateside and the teachers in Brooktown. This

response contrasted starkly with the responses made by the Somerview teachers, that I discuss later in this Chapter.

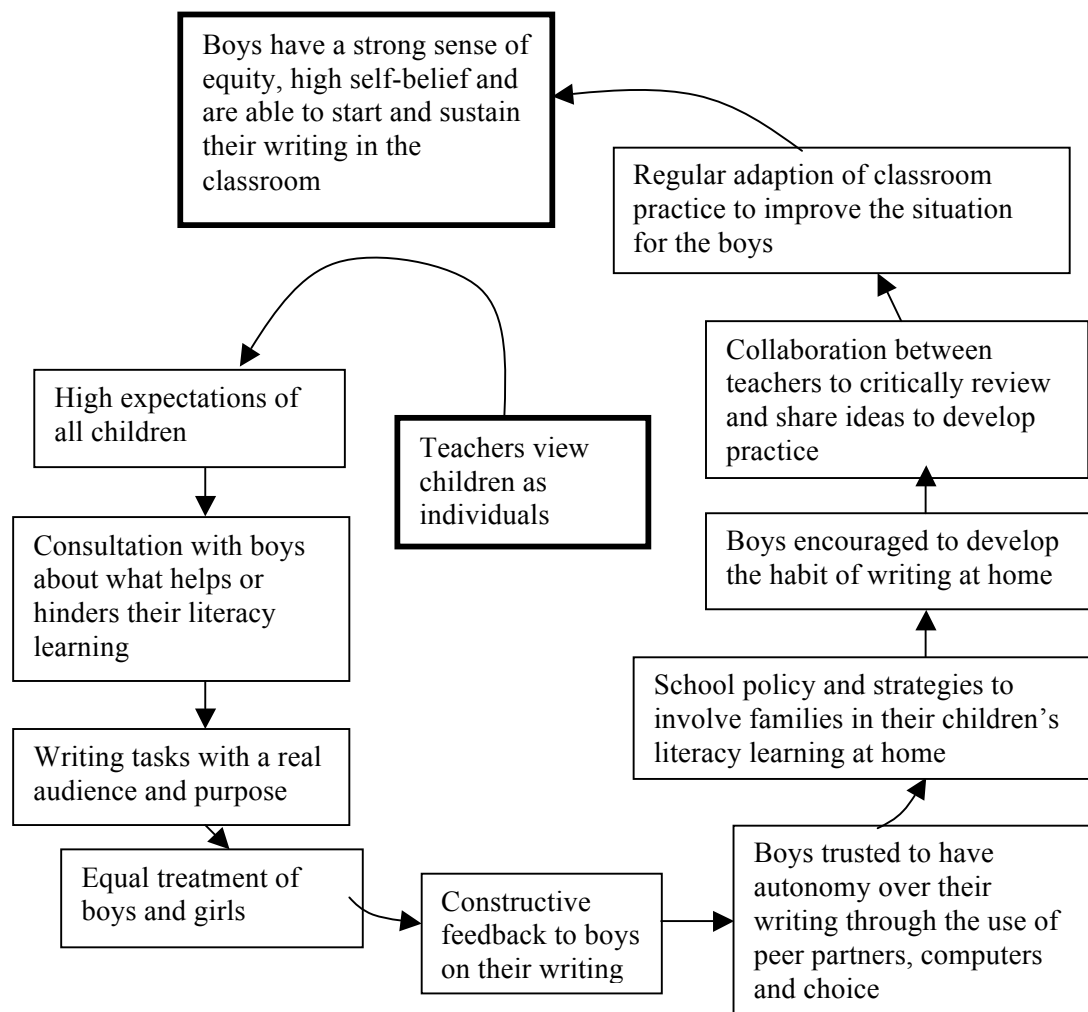
My study agrees with the findings of others that where there was a conflict in the literacy experiences the children had in their homes and school (Heath, 1982; Street, 1984; Jones, 2013), teachers often misjudged children's literacy abilities (Kress, 1994; Gipps, 1999; Paechter, 2007). However, my findings also showed that teachers misjudged the boys' families, and as a result, they were less likely to intervene to encourage the families to engage with their boys' literacy learning. Given the importance of reading in children's development as writers (Barrs & Cork, 2001) and the important role of the school in engaging children's families in their reading and writing (Jeynes, 2005; APPG, 2011), and most importantly in this context, the role of the school in engaging families of boys from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds (Dearing, et al, 2006); the lack of intervention on the part of the teachers to effectively engage the families in the boys' literacy learning meant that an opportunity to encourage the boys to develop the habit of reading and writing at home and school was lost. This contributed to the boys' difficulties in sustaining their writing, particularly in Y6 where they were faced with greater challenges in the length and complexity of their writing tasks.

This isolated and fragmented approach to teaching writing contributed significantly to locking the boys into a cycle of decline, where they had low self-belief, lacked autonomy and motivation, had negative attitudes towards writing and had difficulties in sustaining their writing. I now consider the pedagogical practices that had a positive impact on boys' self-belief and attitude to writing.

Upward learning spiral

The *upward learning spiral*, that emerged from the data, illustrates the pedagogical practices in the school and classroom that had a positive effect on the way the boys responded to writing in the classroom and this is shown below:

Fig. 7.3. An upward learning spiral



I now move on to a discussion of the pedagogical practices illustrated in the *upward learning spiral* shown above.

As discussed earlier in this Chapter, when I interviewed the Somerview boys in Y4 they had a strong sense of inequity, but when they were in Y5 and Y6 their views changed, as their comments below illustrate:

“... well it depends on whose behaviour is best ..” (Owen, Somerview, phase 2)

“[boys treatment in comparison to girls] it depends again on the individual” (Joel, Somerview, phase 3)

Owen and Joel indicate they believe boys were treated according to their own behaviour rather than judged by their gender. As discussed earlier, an explanation for the changes in the boys feelings about equity related: firstly to the Y5 and Y6 teachers' view of the boys as individuals and their high expectations of all the children; secondly their regular consultation with the boys to find out what helped or hindered their literacy learning and thirdly, their readiness to adapt their teaching to meet the needs of the boys. In these conditions there were improvements in the relationships between the children themselves and between the teachers and the boys.

Where the teachers were aware of the importance of boys having autonomy over their writing, as the Y5 and Y6 Somerview teachers were, they tended to use a more extensive range of strategies, such as choice, peer partners and computers for writing, to engage the boys with their writing, as their comments below illustrate:

“... and ownership as well ... I've given them a choice of topic ... not just being teacher-lead and not just coming from my idea of what I'd like the final piece of writing to be like, but they can actually have some input ... we do lots of peer assessment ... partner work for writing ... writing portfolios ... ” (Y5 Somerview teacher, phase 2)

“... children are much more able to think and plan *[when they are using computers]* it's complete ownership of the way it looks ... and we've really worked hard on talking to their partner about their ideas before they write” (Somerview teacher, phase 3)

The Y5 and Y6 Somerview teachers were aware of the importance of children having ownership of their writing and demonstrated to the boys that they valued their ideas by giving them choices in their writing and trusted them to write independently, either with their peers or with the aid of computers. Furthermore, both the Y5 and Y6 teachers in Somerview used peer review, unlike their counterparts in Estateside and

Brooktown, and this meant the boys were more experienced in how to engage with their peers to review their writing when they entered Y6, as illustrated in their comments below:

“Well I think like, when it’s an atmosphere that you’re in, say we’re all working in partners like Joel said I would feel like so happy to work ...” (Richard, Somerview, phase 3)

“I’m the opposite of Joel I really prefer working by myself but the atmosphere does help.” (Lee, Somerview phase 3)

Most noticeably, the boys’ comments indicated they were trusted to choose how they reviewed their writing, either on their own or with their peers and that this contributed to improvements in the atmosphere in the class. These comments contrast starkly with the comments made by the Y5 and Y6 Estateside and Brooktown boys, who entered Y6 with little or no experience of reviewing their writing with their peers and where the unresolved relationship issues between the children in the class mitigated against collaborative activities such as peer review, as discussed earlier in this Chapter. Like the Estateside boys, but unlike the Brooktown boys, as discussed earlier in this Chapter, the Somerview boys also had regular access to the use of computers for writing and knew how to use them to create, edit and present their text using tools such as word processors and presentation software, as illustrated in their comments below:

“... you can be very creative on Powerpoint... I enjoy it in a way and it’s quite fun cos also you can put it on the projector ... (Tim, Somerview, phase 2)

“... it [a computer] makes it a lot easier because it’s got a spelling program, a proof reading program, you can change your writing without making it messy (Lee, Somerview phase 3).

Tim’s use of powerpoint has enabled him to be more creative in the presentation of his writing and Lee’s use of a word processor has enabled him to take control of editing his own writing. Although the Estateside boys had extensive access to their own personal hand-held computers throughout Y4 to Y6, and the Brooktown boys had access to computers for writing for a short time in Y4, and this motivated the boys to

write, as discussed earlier in this Chapter, when this was not combined with other strategies, such as choice and peer partners for writing, this had less impact on their ability to write independently. My findings agree with the findings of others that the use of computers can help children with their writing (Lewis, et al, 1999; Passey, et al, 2004; Figuerdo & Varnhagen, 2006) and that peer partners enable children to jointly construct their understanding of language (Mercer, 2000; Younger & Warrington, 2005). However, my findings have also shown that where teachers employed a wide range of strategies such as, computers, peer partners and choice in writing, the boys had a stronger sense of autonomy and greater ability to write independently of their teachers.

As discussed earlier in this Chapter, my findings have shown that the boys were more able to focus on the meaning and purpose of writing and were less anxious about the technical aspects of writing when the Y6 teachers in each of the three schools in my study focused their teaching of writing on genre rather than the technical aspects of writing. However, my findings have also shown that, unlike her counterparts in Estateside and Brooktown, the Y5 Somerview teacher adapted her teaching earlier to include a genre approach, as her comment below illustrates:

“... it’s easy to get caught up in looking at the strategy [NLS], getting caught in ‘paragraphs this’ and ‘direct speech that’ and you know I think those are important but within the overarching context” (Y5 Somerview teacher, phase 2)

Although the Y5 Somerview teacher is critical of the NLS teaching approach, unlike her counterparts in Brooktown, she is more proactive in her approach to adapting her teaching to ensure the boys do not become over-concerned with the technical aspects of writing. Furthermore, she has adapted her teaching approach to ensure that the individual needs of the boys are met, as her comments below illustrate:

“... so my writing tasks are much more open ... so that children can chose their own interests – because of course I can’t think of one that would be right for everyone – and that has helped them.” (Y5 Somerview teacher, phase 2)

This teacher's ability to adapt her teaching and to focus on the individual needs of the boys and her use of a wide range of strategies to give the boys' autonomy over their writing contributed to increasing the boys' motivation to write in Y5, in contrast to her counterparts in Estateside and Brooktown, who used a narrower range of strategies (see 'Motivation' in summary tables 4.1, 5.1 and 6.1 in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 of this thesis).

The teachers in Somerview, unlike their colleagues in Estateside and Brooktown, also benefited by being supported by a whole school policy on home-school learning and their reading response diaries played a key role in enabling the teachers and the boys' families to enter into an on-going dialogue about the boys' literacy learning, as illustrated in Tim's comments below:

“... cos my mum tells me to write a whole diary and she helps me in trying to plan it and then write it all the way down ... and one day when I'm doing a diary entry I find out that I'm writing beautiful handwriting and thinking, like, how did this happen...”
(Tim, Somerview, phase 2)

As can be seen, Tim's mother has encouraged him to complete his diary and the completion of the diary has also enabled him to practise his handwriting, which he has seen improve with practice. However, the boys were not always enthusiastic about completing their diaries, but unlike their colleagues in Estateside and Brooktown, the Somerview teachers did not give up and accept the boys rejection of the diaries, they worked together to adapt the diaries, as the Y6 teacher's comment below illustrates:

We [*teachers in the school*] had a discussion earlier on in the year about reading responses. As a school they [*the children*] go through writing reading responses throughout the years and they just grow as the children grow ... And we had a discussion on alternative ways to respond to a book and we came up with what we called 'the radical reading response', so it was different ways of responding to books ... so it might be write a piece of music in 'Garageband' to set the mood it might be to use 'I Can Animate' to make a short sequence in response to ...” (Somerview teacher, phase 3)

The impact of this teacher's collaboration with her colleagues and ability to follow this through by adapting her practice to meet the needs of the boys, was evident in Lee's comments below:

"With me ... the reading diary was such fun because you got to design a board game and I did that on the computer and then we did creative reading responses and I did that on the computer" (Lee, phase 3)

Lee's comments indicate he has renewed interest in completing his diary because the teacher has enabled him to choose his own way of responding to his reading, including using the computer, something he really enjoys, to design a board game and write up his response.

My findings agree with others that teachers were more able to adapt their practice when they collaborated together (Stoll & Fink, 1996; Younger & Warrington, 2005). Furthermore, that parental involvement programs do increase parental involvement with their children (Jeynes, 2005; APPG, 2011), but that these were more successful when they were supported by a whole school approach that was understood by all teachers and children and where teachers collaborated to adapt their practice to meet the changing needs of the children as they progressed through the school. As a result of this the Somerview boys were more able to develop the habit of reading and writing at home and school and this has a significant impact on their ability to sustain their writing when they were required to engage in more challenging and longer writing tasks when they entered Y6.

My findings have shown that this holistic approach to the teaching of writing meant the boys had a strong sense of self-belief and autonomy over their writing, were more motivated to engage with their writing in their school classrooms and were more able to sustain their writing and this contributed to ensuring they moved on an upward cycle of improvement.

Conclusion and propositions

I have shown that where teachers held gender stereotypical beliefs, they viewed boys as an underachieving group in comparison to the girls who were viewed as high achievers, and through their daily interactions with the boys, this served to undermine the boys' self-belief and response to writing in the classroom. This finding is in accordance with others, that boys have been essentialised as underachievers in the literacy debate and this has created a false binary dichotomy (Jackson, D. 1998; Jones & Myhill, 2004; Francis & Skelton, 2005; Martino, 2008; Lingard, et al, 2009; Watson, et al, 2010) and this has contributed to lowering teachers' expectations of boys writing in the classroom (Jones & Myhill, 2004; Jones & Myhill, 2007). Furthermore, that where children's literacy experiences in their homes were very different from the literacy practices they experienced in school (Heath, 1982; Street, 1984; Jones, 2013), teachers' misjudged what children were capable of in literacy (Kress, 1994; Gipps, 1999; Paechter, 2007). However, I have also shown that where teachers held both gender and socio-economic beliefs about children as literacy learners, as they did in Estateside and Brooktown, they were less likely to intervene to change the situation for the boys, such as finding out and addressing the gender issues the boys faced or engaging in a dialogue with the boys families about how they could help their boys with their literacy learning. As a result, the boys' sense of inequity increased as they progressed from Y4 to Y6, as did their sense of alienation in their classroom, and this undermined their ability to concentrate on and sustain the more challenging writing tasks they faced, particularly in Y6.

In Estateside and Brooktown the teachers were unaware of the role of gender stereotyping on the boys' literacy learning or how to tackle this in their classrooms, and, I have argued, this was largely the result of a lack of a critically reflective approach to teaching, where they did not consult with the boys about how they felt about their literacy learning or collaborate with other teachers, to jointly share practice and strategies to overcome classroom problems. The Estateside and Brooktown boys had a strong sense of inequity, thought they were treated less fairly than the girls, were not trusted by their teachers, and this was further reinforced in the few opportunities they were offered to have autonomy over their writing, such as peer partner writing or choice in writing activities. As a result, the boys remained overly dependent on their

teachers for support for their writing as they progressed from Y4 to Y6. Although the Estateside boys did have access to their own hand-held computers and their use helped to motivate them to write and reduce their anxiety about handwriting, this single intervention was not enough to give them a strong sense of autonomy. Despite the Y6 teacher/LL (U) in Brooktown attempt to consult with the boys, I have shown that as this was not followed up with a change in classroom practice, there was little or no change in the daily experiences the Brooktown boys had in their classroom. In these conditions, the Estateside and Brooktown teachers were frequently dealing with the symptoms, such as misbehaviour in the classroom, rather than the cause of the boys' difficulties.

In Estateside, the lack of teacher intervention meant the poor behaviour of the girls was not addressed to the point where the boys felt under threat from what they described as the girls 'laddish' behaviour. The boys' response to this was to more strongly reassert their masculinity by demonstrating to their peers that they rejected literacy as a school subject and literacy practices that were seen to be feminine, such as when Leo commented on writing a diary at home, this was met with derision from his classmates and he responded by retracting what he had said. Although my findings agree with the findings of others (Epstein, 1998; Jackson D., 1998; Martino, 1999), that boys' exerted pressure on each other to conform in the classroom to their perception of what it was to be masculine, my findings have highlighted the particular set of conditions that enabled this to happen, and the extent to which these conditions alienated this group of boys from their literacy learning. Furthermore, the negative impact of this on the performance of the boys in writing was evident in a comment made by the Y6 Brooktown teacher/LL (U), who said "... there is only four boys in that [*the top*] set and so it's still the girls are achieving the higher levels." (Y6 teacher/LL (U), phase 3)

Furthermore, where the teachers believed the families were unlikely to be able to help the boys' literacy learning at home, there was a lack of dialogue with the boys' families about their literacy learning. As a result, the families either did not help their boys, or, in the case of some boys, such as Jack in Estateside and Hakan and Elan in Brooktown, did not know how best to help them. Although the Y6 Estateside teacher did attempt to set up a home reading scheme, and it did have an influence on the

families engagement with the boys literacy at home, the lack of a whole school policy, to engage families with their children's literacy learning, meant that this isolated attempt in Y6 was less successful than it would have been if the boys had been encouraged to read and write with their families at home as they progressed through the school.

However, I have also shown that this situation was not static and could change when the boys were taught by different teachers and were learning in a different classroom climate.

This change was most evident in Somerview, where the boys Y5 and Y6 teachers viewed them as individuals, and were proactive in identifying and addressing the issues the boys faced within a holistic approach to the teaching of writing, central to which was a culture of dialogue. In these conditions the teachers: regularly consulted with the boys and had a good understanding of the issues they faced; collaborated with other teachers to critically reflect on and share practice and had a wide repertoire of strategies to tackle classroom issues; and maintained a regular dialogue with the boys' families about their literacy learning.

In the classroom the Y5 and Y6 Somerview teachers, unlike their colleague in Y4, treated the boys as individuals and this was reflected in the greater sense of justice the boys had in Y5 and Y6, in comparison to Y4, and in the boys' belief that they had equal opportunities to do well in literacy. The Y5 and Y6 teachers demonstrated their trust of the boys in the many opportunities they provided for the boys to have ownership over their writing, such as peer review, choice in writing activities and the use of computers and this contributed to the boys growing sense of autonomy as writers as they progressed through Y5 and Y6. Although the Y4 teacher also gave the boys the opportunity to write with their peers, this was less successful as they were less sure how to engage effectively with their peers in Y4. However, this was not the case in Y5, where the teacher's regular consultation with the boys to find out how they were feeling about their writing meant that she was able to gain insights into the reasons for the difficulties they faced and to successfully adapt her practice to address issues, such as their feelings of injustice in the way they were selected for additional handwriting support and their over-concern with the technical aspects of writing.

Similarly, the Y6 teacher, when faced with the boys' waning interest in completing their reading response diaries, consulted with her colleagues to help her to resolve this, the outcome which was a successful re-naming of the diaries and the inclusion of greater choice, that served to motivate the boys to re-engage with the regular completion of their diaries and ensured the teacher continued to have a dialogue with the boys' families. As a result the boys maintained the habit of writing, at home and school throughout Y6, and this contributed to their ability to sustain longer and more challenging pieces of writing as they progressed through the school, best illustrated in the comments made by Joel, Lee and Tim, that they had no difficulty in sustaining their concentration through longer and more challenging pieces of writing when they were in Y6.

My findings from Somerview resonate with those of Rudduck & Flutter, (2000) and MacBeath, et al (2003) that it is important to consult with pupils to find out what they think will make a difference to their commitment to learning and with Stoll & Fink, (1996), Younger & Warrington, (2005), that where teachers collaborate with their colleagues they are more able to adapt to changing contexts and more successful in implementing pedagogical changes. Moreover, as others have shown (Jeynes, 2005; Dearing, et al, 2006; APPG, 2011), it is important for schools to encourage families to engage in their children's literacy learning. However, my findings have shown that these strategies alone were not as effective as when they formed part of a holistic approach to the teaching of writing, where: boys were viewed as individuals and teachers consulted with them to find out the issues they faced in their literacy learning; teachers critically reflected on their own practice and collaborated with their colleagues to share ideas for resolving pedagogical problems and families were involved in their boys' literacy learning through a regular dialogue with the boys' teachers.

In the light of this discussion of the key themes of: gender; socio-economic beliefs; expectations; self-belief and pedagogy; that emerged from my analysis of the data, I now outline five theoretically significant propositions that I derived from this data:

Proposition 1: It is important for teachers to understand **gender issues**, in relation to boys' writing, to ensure they are able to create a **classroom climate** where boys' are viewed as individuals, where their writing is valued and where boys want to write.

Proposition 2: Given the evident difficulties the boys had with certain technical aspects of writing it is helpful if teachers find ways to help them to go **beyond the technical** aspects to be able to **engage** with their writing.

Proposition 3: A culture of **collective responsibility**, and consistency in the practice of teaching literacy contributes to boys' ability to face the demands of writing particularly in Y5 and Y6.

Proposition 4: Boys whose **families** consistently support them to write at **home** show greater commitment to their writing in the classroom. Parents can be supported in this role by the school, most important where children in the school are drawn from largely disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds.

Proposition 5: If teachers use a wide range of strategies to give boys' **autonomy** over their writing they are more likely to be **motivated** to start and then to persist with their writing.

The data sources and detailed evidence to support these five propositions are shown in Appendix 6.

I now turn to Chapter 8: Conclusion where I discuss these propositions in terms of the research questions I framed at the beginning of this study.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

As has been shown throughout this study, four key themes emerged in relation to the influences on boys' attitude towards and engagement with writing in the classroom. These themes were: gender and socio-economic beliefs; self-belief; expectations and pedagogy. The relationship between these themes and the boys' attitude to writing are illustrated in three diagrams, Fig. 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3, in the Findings and Discussion Chapter of this thesis.

There were two questions which framed my research and these were: "In what ways do boys' school and home experiences influence their attitude to writing?" and "To what extent do changes in these experiences over time impact on boys' attitude to writing?" In this Chapter, I respond to these two questions and draw on the four key themes identified above and discuss how these led me to the five propositions I outlined in Chapter 7 of this thesis.

In response to my first question, I discuss the influences on the boys' attitude to writing in the first phase of my study, when the boys were coming to the end of their time in Y4. In response to my second research question I discuss changes in the boys' attitude to writing as they progressed from Y4 to Y6, by contrasting their different experiences in the three schools in my study. In my discussions I refer to relevant data in my thesis to illustrate my findings, and to other research, to highlight where my findings confirm or are at variance with the work of other researchers.

I then turn to a discussion and critical reflection on the process of conducting this research and how this enabled me to gain new insights and perspectives on the issues I was researching. Finally, although my findings are based on a very small sample of data from boys and their teachers in my three research schools, I have been able to identify some ideas that can contribute to the debate on boys and writing and these,

along with some suggestions for future research and implications for practice in the classroom, are discussed at the end of this Chapter.

Research Question 1: In what ways do boys' school and home experiences influence their attitude to writing?

I have come to the conclusion, drawing on the interview data with the boys and their teachers, in response to Research Question 1, that, in certain classroom conditions, the majority of the boys in this research:

- a) preferred school subjects that required the least literacy, disliked writing and lacked belief in themselves as writers;
- b) held strongly gendered views about the performance of girls and boys in literacy and writing and perceived they were treated less fairly than the girls in their classrooms;
- c) were over-concerned with the technical aspects of writing and found it difficult to settle down to starting and then to sustaining their writing.

These findings are illustrated in the comments made by the boys about literacy and writing from the three schools in the first phase of this study, as shown below:

“... I don't like literacy ... I absolutely hate writing ... I'm not good at stuff like punctuation and spelling ... I think girls can do stuff more kind of like hand writing, literacy and art and sometimes in PE but boys are better at like science and physical really physical work out ... I find that the girls get treated a bit better than the boys.” (Joel, Somerview phase 1)

“... I like maths and literacy ... I don't like writing cos I find it easier if we do it on our Q1s because if we do it on our Q1s our hands won't hurt ... on my table it's Nina who keeps on asking Anika if, um, what do we have to do and copying the sentences and that what makes me stop and then when I've um, can't remember my sentence what I had... Girls do better than boys because the girls can write faster than the boys.” (Cal, Estateside, phase 1)

“... I like PE, ICT, DT & art ... I like writing, ok ...but the only part is that is difficult is when you like write too much and your hands start aching and when you get distracted by other people... I think that girls are very good at behaviour ... but girls have a better chance of working harder ...” (Hakan, Brooktown, phase 1)

These snapshots of the boys' comments were illustrative of the comments made by many of their classmates. They indicate that they had a preference for subjects that required the least literacy and disliked writing, harboured strong feelings of inadequacy and tended to blame their difficulties on their aching hands, the teachers' perceived prejudice, the teachers themselves, the misbehaviour of their classmates or just the girls, rather than themselves or the way they behaved in the classroom.

Although Joel articulates that he dislikes literacy, the majority of the other boys showed their dislike of literacy by excluding it from their preferred subjects, indicating their preferences were for subjects that required the least literacy, with Cal the only boy to mention literacy as a subject he liked. Similarly, as Joel and Cal's comments indicate, the boys frequently said they disliked writing, and often blamed their difficulties, such as the particular difficulty they had with the technical aspects of writing, on the distractions caused by other children in the class, or just their perception that the girls were treated more fairly than they were or that girls had more opportunities to do well than they did. Although some of the boys did initially say they liked writing, such as Jack in Estateside and Hakan in Brooktown, they similarly had great difficulty settling down and concentrating on their writing in their classrooms, and like their classmates, lay the blame for their difficulties elsewhere. When asked about writing at home, with the exception of Hakan who wrote stories, the other boys only wrote at home to complete their homework or to write lists, indicating that they viewed writing as functional activity rather than a pleasurable one.

The boys held strong beliefs about girls and boys as literacy learners, and their comments illustrated above were typical of those made by the boys, where the girls, in comparison to boys, were seen by the boys to be better at literacy and handwriting and more able to conform to acceptable standards of behaviour in the classroom. However, some of the Estateside boys did not think girls outperformed them in literacy, with Tate commenting “just because they're girls, doesn't mean they're better

than us”, but this was not the case in phases 2 and 3 of this study, where, without exception, he and his classmates thought the girls outperformed the boys in literacy. Although in this phase, Hakan in Brooktown recognised the girls were better able to conform to the behaviour expected of them in the classroom, and one boy, Richard in Somerview did not blame boys' underperformance in writing on his teachers, the boys rarely acknowledged that their difficulties in settling down to their writing related to their own lack of self-discipline, or that this was a contributory factor in their perceived under-performance in writing. Rather they blamed their teachers' unfairness or what they perceived to be the girls' innate facility with literacy and writing. Although none of the teachers acknowledged they treated boys differently, in my interviews with them they showed they too held gendered views about boys as literacy learners with boys seen to need “more encouragement” (Y4 Somerview teacher) and be “less willing” (Y4 Estateside teacher) to write than girls. These findings agree with the findings of other researchers that boys felt they were treated less fairly by their teachers (Myhill & Jones, 2006) and that teachers were more likely to associate boys with underachievement in literacy than girls (Jones & Myhill, 2004). This highlights the need for teachers to be more aware of gender issues in relation to boys' learning to write and, most importantly, how they can adapt their practice to challenge gender stereotypes, and this is something I return to in response to my second research question, later in this Chapter.

As Joel, Cal and Hakan's comments illustrate, the boys had particular difficulty with forming their handwriting and in writing sentences, were over-concerned with these aspects and unable to see beyond handwriting, words and sentences to the meaning and purpose of their writing. Consequently, this influenced the way they viewed writing. This was most evident in a comment made by John in Brooktown: “when I write I learn spellings”. John sees writing as something that will help him improve his spellings, rather than an activity that can help him communicate his ideas through writing. However, when he and the other boys talked about creating a digital story project they had recently been involved in, they found a language to talk about writing, talking about the narrative and characters in their stories. Similarly, when the Estateside boys talked about their use of their Q1 computers, they were more able to think about what they were writing, as Jack's comment shows “It's just easier to write on the Q1s ... when I'm writing ... my hand starts aching and my mind goes blank and

I can't think of anything ...". The use of computers for writing, in these circumstances, removed the barrier the boys faced with their handwriting and freed them up to think about what they were writing. Nevertheless, the teachers' main focus in this phase was to teach the boys the technical aspects of writing, evident in comments made by the Y4 Somerview teacher "we're giving them all the skills in Y4", and the teachers in all three schools were using the NLS teaching programme that had a heavy focus on these aspects. The lack of comments the boys made about writing activities that had agency for them, indicated the teachers found it difficult to adapt the NLS teaching programme, resulting in few opportunities for boys to engage in activities that freed them up from worrying about aspects of writing, such as their handwriting. Other researchers have argued that the dominance of a technical approach to the teaching of writing, embedded in the NLS teaching programme, was mechanistic and offered too few opportunities for children to make sense of their learning through writing (D'Arcy, 2000; Grainger, et al, 2003; Moss, 2007) and that teachers had less autonomy over their teaching. Although my findings agree with this, in phase 2 of this study, one Y5 teacher was more able to adapt the NLS teaching programme to meet the needs of the boys and this is discussed more fully later in this Chapter. Nevertheless, this did highlight the dilemmas teachers face about how to adapt their teaching, indicating the children have become the victims of an ideological dispute about the best way to teach writing.

In this first phase of my study, the majority of the boys held strongly gendered beliefs about boys and girls as literacy learners, lacked self-belief and found it difficult to persevere with their writing, viewed writing as a mechanical activity and often used their difficulties with these aspects of writing as a smokescreen to avoid getting on with their writing. The teachers also held gendered views about boys and girls as writers and the harsher sanctions they imposed on the boys, served to increase the boys' sense of injustice and further alienated them from writing. The boys' avoidance of writing in the classroom and their unwillingness to persevere when faced with difficulties, particularly their difficulties with the technical aspects of writing, served to reinforce the teachers' gendered beliefs that boys were less good at writing than girls.

The aforementioned led me to assert proposition numbers 1 and 2 (see Appendix 6) and these were:

Proposition 1: It is important for teachers to understand **gender issues**, in relation to boys' writing, to ensure they are able to create a **classroom climate** where boys' are viewed as individuals, where their writing is valued and where boys want to write.

Proposition 2: Given the evident difficulties the boys had with certain technical aspects of writing it is helpful if teachers find ways to help them to go **beyond the technical** aspects to be able to **engage** with their writing.

I now turn to a discussion of the classroom conditions in which the boys were learning in Y5 and Y6 and the conditions that served to improve or impair the boys' feelings about themselves as writers.

Research Question 2: To what extent do changes in these experiences over time impact on the boys' attitude to writing?

I have come to the conclusion, drawing on interview data, in response to Research Question 2 that the boys' attitude towards literacy and writing and their view of themselves as writers was not static and was influenced by the classroom climate created by their individual teachers.

These findings are illustrated in the change in Joel's feelings about writing as shown below:

"... it depends what we're writing in literacy....I'm happier to write anything if I'm enjoying it ... I like newspaper reports and reviews ... I can just go wild with my stories ... so like I try my hardest in my writing ... I think I can work in noise, if it's too silent, when they say silence is the most deafening thing, I think so ... I don't want to be sexist or nothing [*in disagreeing with all the other boys*] but it depends on what subjects because girls don't really enjoy like science in our class ... Um, [*how we are*

treated by our teachers] it depends again on the individual“ (Joel, Somerview, phase 3)

As Joel's comments show, he was less concerned about the technical aspects of writing in Y6 than he had been in Y4 and this reflects the comments made by the other Somerview boys when they were in Y5 and Y6. Although in Y6 this change was largely the result of a change in their Y6 teacher's approach to teaching writing, where she adopted a genre focus, the Y5 teacher also adapted her teaching to try to reduce the boys over-concern with the mechanics of writing, as she said: "... it's easy to get caught up in looking at the strategy [*NLS*], getting caught in 'paragraphs this' and 'direct speech that' and you know I think those are important but within the overarching context". This early adaption in Y5 of her teaching focus contributed to the boys being able to see beyond the technical aspects of writing and to re-engaging with their writing tasks in the classroom.

Although in Y6 Joel continued to perceive that girls in his class did not like science, this was not the case with the other boys in the class who thought that subject preferences related to individual children regardless of gender. However, in contrast to Y4, where the boys had a strong sense of injustice in the way they were treated by their teachers, in Y5 and Y6 they all had a stronger sense of equity, as Owen in Y5 said: "... it [*the way we are treated by our teachers*] depends on whose behaviour is best ...". and less strongly gendered views about boys and girls as literacy learners, where Tim in Y6 said: "... some boys are good at some things and some boys are bad at some things ...". These views were also reflected in the views of their Y5 and Y6 teachers, who continually during their interviews with me asserted the importance of seeing children as individuals, as the Y6 teacher said: "There are things that certain children will always do whether they're a girl or a boy. ... it's sort of knowing about the individual ..."; but these two teachers also intervened in other ways. The Y5 Somerview teacher, after consultation with the boys, stopped the practice of removing boys from class for additional literacy support, something she discovered that the boys interpreted as indicating boys were less good at writing than girls and the Y6 teacher sought to introduce boys to reading material that challenged gender stereotypes, such as a strong female character in war torn Afghanistan. These classroom interventions,

along with the teachers' strong view of children as individuals, served to reduce the extent of the boys' gendered views of boys and girls as literacy learners.

Individual boys also had different preferences in the way they wrote and what they wrote, with Lee preferring to write on his own, whereas the other boys preferred to write with their peers and Joel, Lee and Owen preferred functional writing whereas Tim and Richard preferred creative writing. However, a key factor that had a positive influence on the boys' motivation to write in Y5 and Y6 was the opportunity their teachers gave them to make choices. The Y5 teacher adapted her teaching by introducing more open-ended tasks "...so my writing tasks are much more open ... so the children can choose their own interests", and this helped to motivate the boys, as Tim said: "Well, I like being able to choose ... it depends on what is your favourite bit of writing ... like being creative ... like writing dialogue or writing a story". Similarly, in Y6 the teacher made provision for the boys to write independently or to write with their peers, and this improved the working atmosphere in the class, as Richard said: "Well I think like, when it's an atmosphere that you're in, say we're all working in partners like Joel said I would feel like so happy to work ..." and Lee responded with: "I'm the opposite of Joel I really prefer working by myself but the atmosphere [*when children are writing with their peers*] does help". So, in Y5 and Y6 the teachers' ability to recognise the boys as individuals, with different preferences for what to write and how to write had a considerable impact on motivating the boys to engage with their writing in phases 2 and 3 of this study.

Although the boys showed a resistance to completing their reading response diaries in Y5 and Y6, their teachers were determined to maintain a dialogue with the boys' families about their literacy learning and to encourage the boys to develop the habit of reading and writing at home and school. To do this, the Y5 teacher offered the boys more choices in what they wrote and the Y6 teacher, faced with increasing opposition from the boys, collaborated with her colleagues to find a solution. This involved re-naming the diaries to 'radical reading response diaries' that the boys called 'creative reading response diaries' and giving the boys more choices, and this motivated the boys to re-engage with the diaries, evident in Lee's comments: "... the reading diary was such fun ... design a board game ... and we did creative reading responses and I did that on the computer". These teachers' interventions ensured the boys continued to

practise their writing at home and school and that their families knew how best to help their boys.

In this classroom climate, the Somerview boys had stronger self-belief, and, with the exception of Owen who continued to have difficulty with longer pieces of writing, were more able to sustain longer and more challenging pieces of writing as they progressed through Y5 and Y6.

However, for Cal and Hakan in Estateside and Brooktown, the classroom experiences they described were very different from the Somerview boys, as Cal and Hakan's comments below illustrate:

“... If it [*the writing*] is something we can like make up or do something ourselves ... then I like that, but if it's like a report or something then no I don't like that ... if you're still doing your writing, people will come over and do games on the table you're actually writing on and it disturbs you and makes you want to get involved ... Girls do better [*in our school*] because they get in less trouble ... so it ends up frustrating the boys so they do less work ... Whenever like one of the boys are working some girls are like coming round and slap us and then when we go and tell miss, miss tells us off instead of her. The boys try really hard to like get on with their work but as soon as they've concentrated ... the girls they try to distract us ...” [Cal, Estateside, phase 3)

“... sometimes it [*writing*] is a fun thing to do like you can do a little storyboard and make up a story or poem ... I don't like doing news reports ... you just get bored then when you can't think of any ideas ... playtime in the classroom [*distracts me from learning*] ... I think that girls do better at writing cos boys really like maths and maths is like one answer to every question with writing there's so many answers it's much easier for the girls ... I think it's wrong really. I keep thinking to myself, why does he keep choosing girls, why doesn't he choose a boy. And I think it's so bad because boys don't get chosen to be student of the week cos I'm a boy. (Hakan, Brooktown, phase 3)

Although Cal and Hakan also viewed writing less as a technical activity in Y6, unlike the Somerview boys, they had greater difficulty concentrating on their writing in the

classroom, they believed that girls did better because they received better treatment and had a strong sense of inequity in their classrooms.

In Estateside, Cal's comments indicate that the relationships between the boys and the girls had worsened since Y4, and the unchecked behaviour of the girls had resulted in the girls behaving like 'ladettes' and bullying the boys, to the extent that Jack suggested: "... I think we should set it [*our difficulties with the girls*] into an actual debate into the classroom so we can sort out our problems ...". But Cal thought the problem was so severe that a debate as Jack suggested, was unlikely to change anything, and said: "... teachers don't trust the boys because they like trust the girls more than the boys ...". This comment reflects a breakdown of trust between the boys and their teachers and the extent to which the boys felt disenfranchised in their classroom. However, their Y5 and Y6 teachers showed no awareness of the extent of the boys' feelings about gender issues, but they too held gendered views about the boys, with boys seen as "very much minimal" in their writing and girls being "more inclined to read fictional writing" and girls being "more likely to want to write". In Brooktown, Hakan's comments indicate he thought girls were inherently better at literacy than boys, and this, alongside their preferential treatment, in his view accounted for the girls' superiority in literacy. Similarly, with the exception of the Y5 Brooktown teacher (E), who viewed the children as a whole class who were underachieving, rather than individuals with different strengths and weaknesses, the other Y5 and Y6 Brooktown teachers also held gendered views of boys and girls, with girls seen to need "less stimulus" to write and boys viewed as more "mathematically minded".

The failure of the Y5 and Y6 Estateside and Brooktown teachers to see the boys as individuals, and the lack of consultation with the boys to find out their issues, meant there were no interventions to change things in their classrooms and this served to undermine the boys' self-belief and reinforcing their belief that girls did better in literacy than boys and in Estateside particularly, contributed to the deterioration in the relationship between the boys and girls.

Cal and Hakan's comments also reflect a worsening in the children's behaviour in the classroom, and this issue was cited most often in relation to the difficulties the boys

had in concentrating on their writing. However, their comments also reflect that the children in the class lacked autonomy as writers and were unprepared for the challenge of writing in Y6, particularly when they were required to write for longer periods of time, evident in comments made in Y6 by Kelvin in Estateside, when he said "...when other people finish you're like the only ones left ..." and John in Brooktown "... the teachers stop you in a long piece of writing that you never get finished ...". Kelvin did not like his difficulties to be exposed to the rest of the class and John blamed his difficulties on his teachers for interrupting him when he was writing. Although the Y6 Estateside teacher did use strategies such as peer review to help the boys to take more responsibility for their writing, he explained the boys' difficulties in terms of the fault of his colleagues, who he thought had not taught the children to write in a wide range of different genres and this meant he had to spend time teaching them when he felt he should not have had to do this, when he said: "... from Y1 ... if they're revisiting *[genres]* when the come into Y6 *[they would know how to write in different genres]* ...". But, he showed no awareness of his own responsibility, as literacy leader, to help his colleagues to address this in their teaching. In Brooktown, faced with boys who she thought lacked responsibility for their writing, this teacher also blamed her colleagues, when she said: "... It's taken a really long time to get them to, um, feedback to partners and talk about improvements that is unrelated to their handwriting ... if I was to take those boys back to Y4, I would spend a lot more time structuring it up". Although, to a certain extent, the complaints the Y6 Estateside and Brooktown teachers made about their colleagues, reflect the pressure they were under to prepare the children for their SATs tests, they also reflect a lack of a shared understanding between the teachers in the school about the literacy practice in different year groups and a lack of shared responsibility for the children they taught. As a result, when the boys arrived in Y6, they were not used to having autonomy over their writing, one of the requisites for being able to sustain the longer and more challenging pieces of writing their teachers expected them to undertake.

With the exception of Jack in Estateside and Hakan in Brooktown, who received help with their writing at home from their families in Y4, Y5 and Y6, the other boys did not and only wrote at home for functional purposes, such as to complete their homework. Although the Y6 Estateside teacher did try a one-off intervention to encourage the boys to read at home, and with the exception of Cal in Y6, this resulted in the boys

receiving some help at home from their families, the teacher did not think it had been successful and tended to blame the families for this, when he said: “ ... I also feel ... it's kind of social ... and cultural, ... whether the boys ... had role models ... that were actually writers or readers ...”. Similarly, Hakan and John's Y6 teacher in Brooktown also thought the language the boys used in their homes with their families was the problem, when she said: “Sentence structure ... that goes across the board because ... if they're not speaking the language as it's expected here, then they find that difficult ...”. This view was echoed in the comments made by the other Y5 and Y6 teachers I interviewed in Brooktown, where they blamed the boys socio-economic background and their families for the difficulties the boys had in writing, rather than what the school could do to help.

The comments made by the Estateside and Brooktown teachers explain their lack of intervention to initiate a system to encourage families to engage with their boys' literacy learning, but, unlike the Somerview teachers, they were not supported by a whole school policy, something that other writers have argued is essential in engaging families in their children's literacy learning (Jeynes, 2005; Dearing, et al 2006 & 2008; APPG, 2011), particularly children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds (Dearing, et al, 2006). As a result, the boys did not develop the habit of writing at home and school, and the families were less aware they needed to help their boys or how best to do that.

In this climate, boys had low self-belief and were unprepared for the additional demands of writing in Y6 and found it difficult to sustain their writing tasks, particularly in Y6, as they approached their SATs tests.

The aforementioned led me to assert proposition numbers 3, 4 and 5 (see Appendix 6) and these were:

Proposition 3: A culture of **collective responsibility**, and consistency in the practice of teaching literacy contributes to boys' ability to face the demands of writing particularly in Y5 and Y6.

Proposition 4: Boys whose **families** consistently support them to write at **home** show greater commitment to their writing in the classroom. Parents can be supported in this role by the school, most important where children in the school are drawn from largely disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds.

Proposition 5: If teachers use a wide range of strategies to give boys' **autonomy** over their writing they are more likely to be **motivated** to start and persist with their writing.

I now turn to further reflections on conducting this research.

Reflections on conducting this research

To conduct my study I used an approach based on the principles and methods associated with grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), where theoretical propositions emerge from data through the process of constant comparison. I considered this to be the best approach because even though I was aware that boys were less positive about writing than girls and this is well attested in the literature, I did not have a theory that fully explained this phenomenon. The analysis of my data, involving the continual process of asking questions and making comparisons using codes to label, categories to explain larger segments of data, mind maps to group and re-group data annually and then compare and contrast the data collected over three years enabled me to identify key themes. This process enabled me to refine the data and 'move an analytic story in a theoretical direction' (Charmaz, 2006) from which I was able to make some theoretical propositions in relation to the influences on boys' attitude to writing.

The use of interactional analysis to consider in more detail the prolonged interactions between the boys, on issues such as gender, enabled me to identify the boys' individual views and how their contributions influenced the feelings of others (Goffman, 1959; 1981). This close analysis also enabled me to identify the social processes that the boys' shared stories revealed (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990), how they developed a

shared story (Heritage, 1994) and how they managed controversial actions (Heritage & Raymond, 2005).

The research journal I kept enabled me to record my field notes, following interviews with the boys and their teachers and write my reflections in the form of memos that enabled me to put structure and meaning into my notes (Appendix 3 and 4 of this thesis).

Although this is a small-scale study involving focus group interviews with small groups of boys and one-to-one interviews with their teachers, the location of the schools in three very different socio-economic areas and the repeated interviews conducted over three years provided me with a rich source of comparative data.

Comparing and contrasting the six data sets I collected in phase 1 of this study and further twelve data sets in phases 2 and 3 provided me with a larger data set from which I was able to identify points of convergence and contrasts and draw some tentative conclusions. Continued critical reflection of my findings, using my research journal to distance myself from my data, set aside any preconceptions, and memo my thoughts, gave me a deeper insight into the data sets from which a number of overarching themes began to emerge; such as gender and socio-economic beliefs and teachers' expectations that helped explain the differential performance of boys and girls in literacy. This gave me a unique insight into the different conditions the boys experienced in their schools and classrooms, as they progressed from Y4 to Y6, and how these conditions affected their response to writing in the classroom, something I would not have seen had I not repeated the data collection over this three-year period.

Although this process was time consuming, challenging and required me to be constantly critically reflexive, it helped me to identify the critical impact of the whole context: classroom, school and home/care environment. The return visits to the schools to re-interview the boys and their teachers over a three year period was also demanding but did show me that the situation for the boys was not static and changed over time as a result of changes in their classroom, school and home contexts. This led me to question again the insights I had made in previous phases and though my study is small in scale, this gave me confidence in the data and with the conclusions I have

drawn as a result. Though my sample was small and would have been richer had I been able to collect a larger data set, overall the research design was effective for the purpose of this research study.

Finally, the weaknesses of this study are that it was small in scale and involved a small number of boys and their teachers in only three schools, and as such my findings were based on a comparatively small data set. However, the three visits I made to the schools to re-interview the boys and their teachers, did provide me with a larger data set with which to draw some conclusions about the changes in boys' attitude to writing as their circumstances in the classroom changed, when they were taught by different teachers. A different sample in other schools in a different location may well have yielded different findings. Further research would be useful here.

Conclusion and contribution to research

In certain conditions, boys harbour strongly gendered views about themselves as literacy learners, think that girls outperform them in literacy and writing, and this undermines their self-belief and makes it difficult for them to start and sustain their writing in the classroom. However, my study has also shown that the boys' gendered beliefs were not static and I have highlighted the conditions that served to maintain and reinforce these views and those that reversed them. In the least enlightened conditions, the boys were taught by teachers who also held gendered views, did not critically reflect on their views, or their role in reinforcing these views and were unaware of the impact this had on the boys' response to literacy learning in their classrooms. My findings agree with those who argued that the focus in the debate about boys' underachievement has contributed to boys being viewed by teachers as binary opposites, and that this masks their individual differences, rendering girls invisible as well as boys who may be underachieving (Jackson, D. 1998; Jones & Myhill, 2004; Francis & Skelton, 2005), masks issues such as socio-economics that contribute to underachievement (Jones & Myhill, 2007) and to issues such as poverty, ethnicity and disability and the kinds of help educators can provide (Martino, 2008; Lingard, et al, 2009; Watson, et al, 2010). My findings also agree with others that where there was conflict between the home and school experiences of the boys, teachers often

misjudged children's literacy abilities (Kress, 1994; Gipps, 1999; Paechter, 2007), but my findings have shown the combined impact of both gender and socio-economic stereotyping on the conditions in which the boys were learning in the classroom and the impact of this on their response to writing (illustrated in the downward spiral in fig. 7.2 later in this Chapter).

These conditions served to maintain boys' underachievement in writing, rather than reversing it, and were most evident in the increasing sense of alienation the Estateside and Brooktown boys' felt in their literacy classroom, and where only four boys made it into the top writing set in Y6 in Brooktown.

By contrast, my study revealed the kind of help that educators can provide, most importantly where teachers had more enlightened views of boys and girls as literacy learners and did not judge children by their gender or their socio-economic background, and where they were more proactive in intervening to challenge gender stereotypes, within a 'holistic approach' to the teaching of writing. This approach is illustrated in the practice of the Y5 and Y6 Somerview teachers (illustrated in fig. 7.3 later in this Chapter). Central to this approach was a climate of trust, and a culture of dialogue between the boys, their teachers and the boys' families. In these conditions the boys felt they were valued members of their literacy classroom, had stronger self-belief and were more resilient as writers.

In the light of these discussions of my key findings, I am arguing that my **original contribution** to the literature is that, in certain conditions, boys do harbour strong feelings of inadequacy as writers and find it easy to blame others, their aching hands or teacher' perceived prejudice or just blaming the girls rather than acknowledging their own poor behaviour or the link between this and achievement. But, I have shown that this is not static and can be reversed at a critical stage, not with a single change in classroom practice alone, such as a process (Czerniewska, 1992; D'Arcy, 2000) or a genre approach to the teaching of writing (Wray & Lewis); the use of computers (Goldberg, 2003; Passey, 2004), engaging families in children's literacy learning (Jeynes, 2005; Dearing, et al 2006) or in the provision of 'boy friendly' writing activities based on the assumption that boys have particular preferences and learning styles (Martino, 2008; Lingard, et al, 2009; Watson, et al, 2010), but through a

combination of changes encompassed within what I have called a '**holistic**' approach to the teaching of writing, central to which is an understanding of children as **individuals**, irrespective of their **gender** or their **socio-economic** background and where teachers:

- 1) **consult** with the boys to explore their issues, such as their deep sense of injustice in the classroom, anxiety about the mechanical aspects of writing and desire to have greater autonomy over their writing;
- 2) **collaborate** with colleagues to critically reflect on the issues raised by the boys and how their practice can be adapted, such as linking writing activities to fiction books that challenge gender stereotypes, to encourage the boys to reflect on their gendered beliefs of boys as writers;
- 3) **communicate** with the boys' families, through systems such as the reading response diaries, so families participate more fully in their boys' literacy learning, enabling the boys to develop the habit of writing at home and school.

In these conditions, teachers and the boys' families have greater awareness of the boys' needs and how to best support them. As a result, the boys have stronger self-belief, are more able to start, persist and sustain their writing and are better prepared to face new challenges, particularly in Y6 where they are preparing for their SATs tests. If, as some have argued, self-belief is important to enable people to persist with tasks they find difficult (Bandura, 1977) and that it is important that people do not see failure as an indictment of themselves and that their position is fixed (Dweck, 2000) then it is important for teachers to confront the issues which create these conditions in their classrooms and to understand how they can change them to enable boys to thrive as writers. As Dweck (2000) has aptly said:

The hallmark of successful individuals is that they love learning, they seek challenges, they value effort, and they persist in the face of obstacles (Dweck, 2000:1)

Although I recognise that there are other external influences on the boys' views about girls and boys as writers, such as their friends and families, the media and the books they read, and that teachers cannot be expected to change this alone, my study has

shown that it is possible for individual teachers to make a significant contribution to challenging gender stereotypes and creating the conditions that enable the boys to thrive as individual writers.

Albeit my study was small in scale and involved only a very small number of boys and their teachers, the re-interviewing of the participants over three years did enable me to gather comparative data, with which to draw some useful insights. As a result I have been able to identify the changes in the boys' feelings about writing as they progressed from Y4 to Y6 in their primary schools and the set of conditions that influenced these changes. Most importantly, I have shown the centrality of the classroom teacher and the things that they do in developing the boys' sense of worth as writers.

Implications for practice and future research

My study enabled me to see the factors that contributed to the conditions which trapped these boys in either an upward or a downward learning spiral and the need for teachers to be aware of the factors that can create the downward spiral and what they can do to change this in order to move onto something new. These spirals are shown below in Figs. 7.2 and 7.3 (copied from the Main Findings Chapter of this thesis).

Fig. 7.2. A downward learning spiral

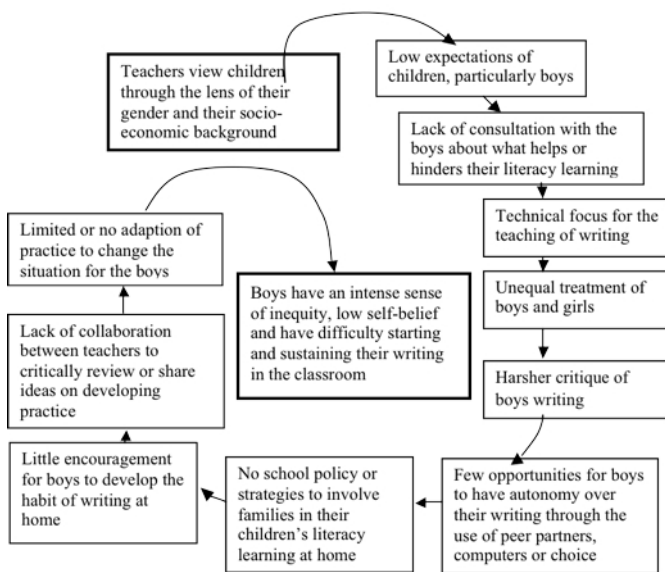
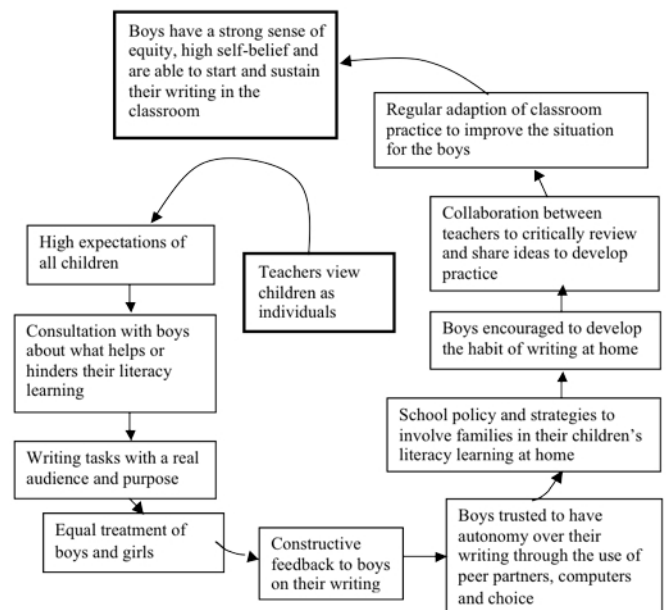


Fig. 7.3. An upward learning spiral



I now move on to discuss the main implications for practice:

My findings have highlighted the factors that contribute to the conditions where boys thrive as writers and those where they do not. Central to these findings are the importance of teachers' understanding of their own beliefs and how their beliefs affect the way children perceive themselves, and the impact this has on the children's response to their learning in the classroom.

Although teachers have access to professional development through their participation in pre-service and in-service educational programmes and through membership of their professional associations, my findings have demonstrated that it is important to avoid the assumption that they are able to create the conditions where children want to learn, without the opportunity to develop their knowledge and understanding in the context of their own schools through on-going school-based professional development. In light of this I make the following three suggestions, central to which is a 'holistic' approach to the teaching of writing that embodies a culture of dialogue where teachers 'consult/collaborate/communicate':

First, teachers find ways to listen to the pupils themselves in order to gain their perspective on the conditions of learning in the classroom and school. As Rudduck, et al (2000) argued, the regimes and relationships in schools shape pupils' sense of status as individual learners and this can affect their sense of commitment to learning in school and, as such, it was important for teachers to find ways to create a dialogue with pupils in order to harness their insights in support of their learning. Some useful suggestions were made by MacBeath, et al (2003) for consulting pupils, such as: small group discussions, questionnaires, writing logs and drawing in order to generate insights which deepened understanding and informed practice. As my interview data with the boys and their teachers have shown, where teachers were aware of the impact of gender stereotyping on the boys' views of themselves as learners, they were more able to find ways to challenge this in their literacy teaching, while at the same time exploiting the boys' preferences, such as collaborative writing; the use of ICT for drafting, re-drafting and presenting writing; and the provision of greater choice in writing. These changes engaged the boys more fully in their writing, where they were more committed to starting and sustaining their writing and less concerned with their difficulties, such as 'aching hands'.

Second, that schools set up learning communities where teachers have the opportunity to regularly share and critically reflect on their practice. It has been argued that learning is a social phenomenon and as such people learn best when they are learning in the context of their workplace with their colleagues in 'communities of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). In this context, it is argued that learning has more meaning because the practitioners share common experiences and can learn from each other, share expertise and resources that have worked in their situation and discuss how to resolve common problems. As my findings have shown, where teachers critically reflected on their own practice and collaborated with their colleagues, they were more aware of the impact on the boys' of gender stereotyping, and were able to draw from a wider repertoire of strategies to jointly resolve classroom issues that enabled them to successfully adapt their teaching to respond to the changing needs of the boys. Further, this collaborative approach would also help teachers to interpret changes required in the National Curriculum programmes of study for English (DfE 2013), and to discuss how best to implement the new curriculum in their own schools. However, my findings also agreed with those who found that effective

professional learning communities were less evident in schools with certain contextual factors, such as those who served children mainly from disadvantaged socio-economic families and where staff turnover in the school was high (Bolam, 2005). Where this was the case, schools could consider drawing on expertise from external professionals, such as other schools, universities or independent expert practitioners to act as 'critical friends'.

Third, schools are encouraged to create a culture of shared responsibility, between teachers and the children's families, so that families know how to support their children's literacy learning at home, such as through their contribution to an ongoing teacher/family dialogue in their children's reading diaries. Bolam, et al (2005) found that some schools engaged families and children in their literacy learning by including them into their staff professional learning community, where children were invited to give their views about their learning experiences and families were invited into some professional development days. Dearing, et al (2006) argued that school intervention programs to involve families in their children's literacy learning were vital to improve relationships between families and teachers and this was particularly important for children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds who face additional challenges in their literacy learning. However, where the schools were unable to draw on the support of families, school-based support, such as mentoring schemes, writing clubs or inviting professional writers into the school, could be used to encourage and inspire the children.

Literacy policy in the future

My findings have shown that teachers' understanding of boys' learning needs and their accessibility to working practices which enabled them to share and critically reflect on their practice with their colleagues were central to changing the conditions for the boys, most importantly the creation of a classroom climate where the boys felt trusted, and where they had a sense of equity and autonomy over their writing. Furthermore, where the school developed a partnership with the boys' families to share in the responsibility for the boys' development as writers the boys showed a greater commitment to their writing. In these conditions the boys moved on an upward spiral

where they showed stronger self-belief and were more able to start and sustain their writing and were better prepared for the new challenges of writing as they progressed from Y4 to Y6. These are small yet significant changes that schools could make to their existing regimes to improve the conditions for the boys rather than their involvement in large-scale interventions such as the NLS, as Moss (2009) has aptly said:

... it would be foolish to imagine that there is a magic bullet waiting out there, a foolproof set of conditions, or pedagogic method, a crucial missing element which could bring things round the corner to match expectations of uniformly high performance. (Moss, 2009:164)

This was echoed in the All Party Parliamentary Report on Literacy, which concluded that there was not one single way to teach literacy but that teachers needed to be free to choose from a range of methods and resources and their professional judgement ought to be respected (APPG, 2011). This sentiment is echoed in the programmes of study (PoS) for English, where teachers are encouraged to use the programmes as a structure but that this should not “constrain or restrict teachers’ creativity” (DfE, 2013:5), such as to teach elements of spelling, grammar, punctuation alongside ‘language about language’ central to which is collaborative pupil discussion of language. Although there are no explicit links between the programmes of study for computing and those for English, there is the potential for teachers to use the stories children write in their literacy lessons as the context for the creation of their computer programs, where they re-create the story in the form of words, moving images and sounds, a form of text production described as multimodal (Kress, 2003; Rowsell, 2013). However, teachers would need to identify the possibilities for cross-curricular work and discuss with their colleagues in school how best to implement this in their classrooms.

Nevertheless, if teachers’ sense of isolation, boys’ sense of alienation and families’ lack of participation are a true reflection of the culture in some schools, then there is a need to address the regimes and relationships in schools that underpins this fragmented approach to teaching literacy, to ensure that the children can thrive as individual writers.

Future research is therefore needed in order to explore ways in which boys' identity as writers can be strengthened, so that they do not view writing as an alien form of literacy which has no relation to the way they communicate with their friends and families and where they can find their own voice. Exploring how opportunities for talking, sharing, practising and making considered choices could be used to promote non-gendered pupil collaboration, debate and argument in mixed groups, so that children can break away from traditional discussions, evident in the gendered way the boys in my study talked about the girls and boys as literacy learners, typical in Hakan's comment from Brooktown "I think that girls do better at writing cos boys really like maths ...". Giving children the opportunities to reflect and write about the influences of books, magazines, the Internet and television on their view of themselves as girl and boy literacy learners. Teachers also have a key role to play in openly discussing and confronting their own prejudice, taking more agency in framing and enacting school policy and making this a central plank in equal opportunities, looking at individual achievements, defining children's individual identities as individual writers, not boy or girl writers and identifying how children's families can actively participate. Nevertheless, for improvements in practice to take place, there is a need for teacher agency, teacher community and teacher discussion to help teachers re-discover a language to talk about learning and teaching in an atmosphere of mutual trust, respect and support.

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Appendix 1

Example of grid used for transcription of focus group interviews with the boys

(Comments column shows: 1) initial coding in italics; 2) focused coding in bold type)

Count	I/B	Questions & Responses	Comments
23.54	I	Do girls or boys do better in your school or are they the same?	
	Ian	I think girls do better at school.	<i>Girls do better.</i> Gendered perceptions of performance.
	I	Why do you think that?	
	Jack	I think sometimes it's equal but sometimes I think that like sometimes I think that um girls do better at school cos they get an easier time and sometimes we get, if we do something we would get in like trouble but if they do something, the girls do something they wouldn't get in trouble. The teacher would just believe them or something like that so they have nothing to worry about the boys are thinking about the rest of the day and what's happened and getting angry and upset and so they don't do as much work so I think the girls get an easier time.	<i>Girls do better because teachers believe girls & not boys and boys get into more trouble which upsets them and they don't do as much work.</i> Gendered perceptions of performance; unfairness; lack of trust & lower performance.
	Cal	I agree with Jack, but like the girls get an easier time and the boys get a harder time at school because like say the girls done something to this boy the boy would get the blame and the girl would get away with it	<i>Girls get an easier time than the boys & this makes it harder for boys.</i> Unfairness & lack of trust
	Kel.	Yeh, I think that girls get an easier time cos say if a girl did something to a boy um the teacher is more likely to believe the girl.	<i>Teachers believe girls more than boys.</i> Unfairness & lack of trust.
	I	Travis, do you have a view	
	Tate	Same as Kelvin, because lots of the teachers are girls, right,...	<i>Teachers treat boys unfairly because they are mostly girls.</i> Unfairness & lack of trust

Appendix 2

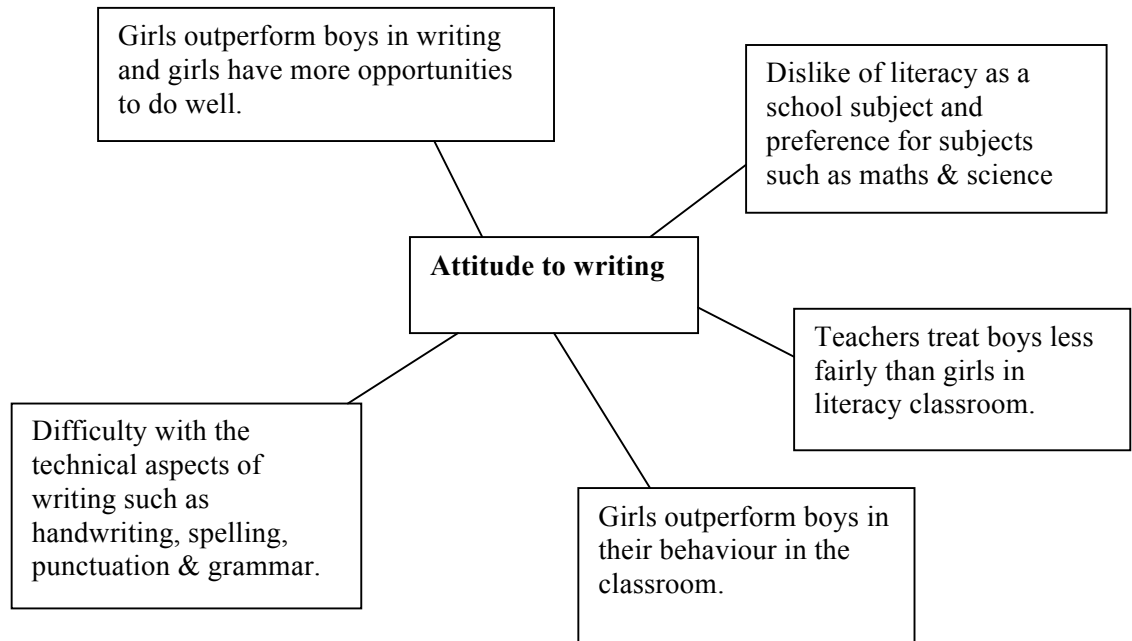
Example of grid used for transcription of interviews with the teachers

(Comments column shows: 1) initial coding in italics; 2) focused coding in bold type)

Count	I/T	Questions & Responses	Comments
17.29	I	Is there anything the children find particularly difficult?	<i>All children have difficulty with written grammar and punctuation because of the way they speak at home. Socio-economic stereotypical view of the language children use in their homes.</i> <i>No difference between boys and girls. Children not used to being asked questions and responding in full sentences at home. Socio-economic stereotypical view of the talk the children experience in their homes.</i> <i>Girls more willing than boys to respond to feedback and edit writing and more able to sustain writing. Gendered views about girls' & boys' performance as writers.</i>
	T	Sentence structure is something and I don't know if the other teachers told you that, but that goes across the board because of course a lot of the children have English as a second language and so if they're not speaking the language as it's expected here, then they find that difficult. You look at how they are taught, and they are taught the correct way but they get to Y6 and they're still not doing something like as simple as putting a full stop at the end of a sentence or a capital letter at the beginning.	
18.33	I	Do you notice any differences between boys and girls in their attitude to writing or are they about the same?	
	T	Um, when I look around I think no, I can think of one or two boys that aren't liking it and one or two girls. I think we need to do more speaking and listening, you know, when children aren't being used to asked questions, we need to be expecting them to answer in full sentences because if they don't get that practice and that experience in their homes they're not getting it anywhere else.	
20.38		[... discussion about teacher talking to children in class ...]	
	I	Do you any difference between boys and girls in terms of their response to your feedback or are they about the same?	
	T	I think girls are more willing to add those improvements. I'm not sure why, just, I don't know really. I mean it's not obviously all the girls and all the boys, but a larger proportion of girls than boys, and give them attention, will go back to it, but as a group of boys they've written as much as they're gonna write, and they go away and they won't change it, because to them they've finished that and the boys find it more difficult to sustain their writing.	

Appendix 3

Example of mind map to analyse focus group interviews with boys in phase 1



The category 'attitude to writing' was re-grouped into four categories as shown below:				
School	Difficulties with writing	Fairness	Differential performance	Attitude to literacy & writing
Somerview	All 5 boys had difficulty with the technical aspects of writing	All 5 boys thought they were treated less fairly than the girls in their literacy classroom.	With the exception of Richard, the boys thought girls outperformed boys in literacy & writing.	All 5 boys had preferences for subjects that required the least literacy & all disliked writing.
Estateside	All 6 boys had difficulties with the technical aspects of writing	All 6 boys thought they were treated less fairly than the girls in their literacy classroom.	With the exception of Cal, the boys thought girls and boys performed equally in literacy & writing.	With the exception of Cal, who liked literacy, the other boys preferred subjects with the least literacy. With the exception of Jack, the other boys disliked writing.
Brooktown	All 4 boys had difficulties with the technical aspects of writing	All 4 boys thought they were treated less fairly than the girls in their literacy classroom.	Without exception the boys thought that girls outperformed boys in literacy & writing.	Without exception the boys preferred subjects with least literacy, but with the exception of Elan who was ambivalent, the other 3 boys liked writing.

Memo on attitude

Attitude is the way a person consistently responds positively or negatively towards a given subject.

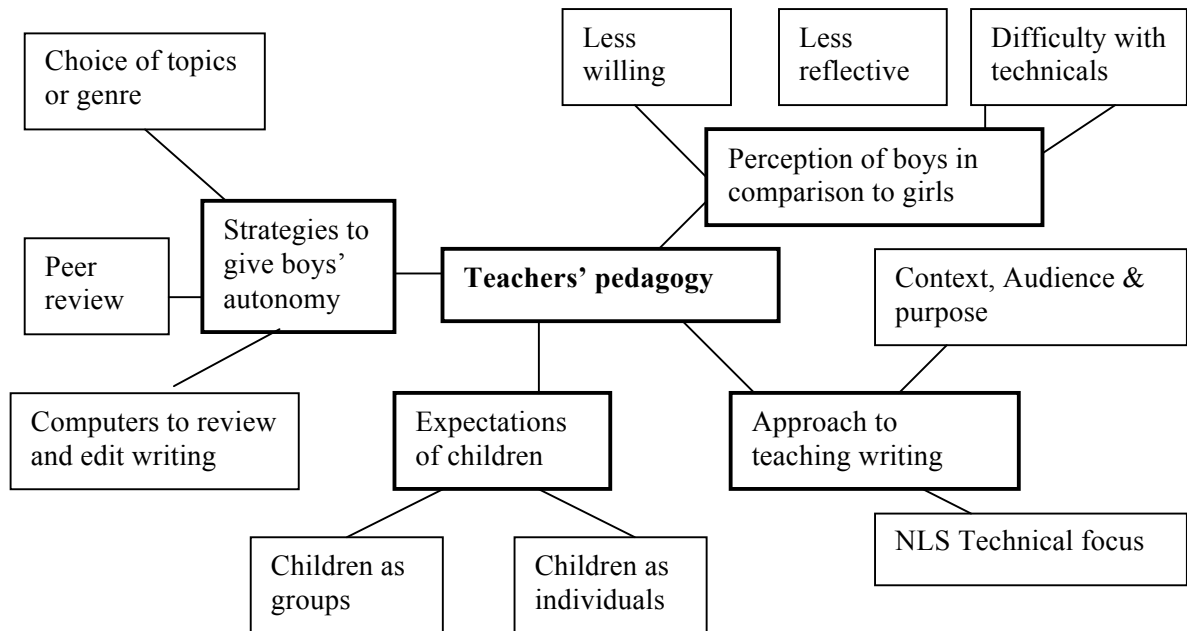
In Somerview and Estateside, with the exception of Cal & Jack, the boys' preferred subjects that required the least literacy and disliked writing. Although the Brooktown boys similarly showed little liking for literacy, they were more positive about writing, where Uri said he liked writing because he "believed he was good at it" and John "I like writing a lot". This is in stark contrast to Somerview where Joel said he "absolutely hated writing" and Lee "I've got rubbish handwriting". Nevertheless, although the Brooktown boys were highly critical of their Y4 teachers, they had been taught by external literacy and literacy/ICT subject experts when they were in Y4 and this may have accounted for their positive feelings about writing. The strength of the boys' feelings about literacy and writing, and whether they stay the same or change, as conditions in their classrooms change, are issues I will track in future interviews.

Without exception, the boys in all three schools indicated they had difficulties with the technical aspects of writing, and their comments indicated they viewed writing as a technical activity, and again their views about writing are something I will track in future interviews.

Without exception the boys perceived they were treated less fairly than the girls in their literacy classroom and with the exception of Richard in Somerview and Cal in Estateside, all the other boys had strongly gendered views about boys and girls as literacy learners, and thought that girls outperformed boys in literacy and writing. This perception undermined their belief in themselves as writers. As self-belief influences the way a person copes in different situations, it is likely that this may be a factor in their inability to persevere when faced with the difficulties they had, particularly with the technical aspects of writing. The extent to which the boys maintain or change their gendered views and their sense of inequity, are issues I will track in future interviews.

Appendix 4

Example of mind map to analyse interviews with teachers in phase 2



Similarity and difference in teachers' pedagogy in the three schools is shown below:			
Aspect of pedagogy:	Somerview	Estateside	Brooktown
<i>Perception of boys in comparison to girls</i>	Viewed children as individuals	Viewed boys as low achievers	Viewed all children as low achievers
<i>Expectations of children</i>	High for all children	Low for boys	Low for all children
<i>Approach to teaching writing</i>	Adapts NLS to ensure children see meaning and purpose of writing.	Themed approach with focus on technical aspects of writing.	Heavy dependency on NLS technical approach.
<i>Strategies to give boys' autonomy</i>	Wide repertoire of strategies used to give children autonomy.	Some strategies to give children autonomy.	Few opportunities for children to have autonomy

Memo

Distinct differences emerging in this 2nd phase between the schools in relation to teachers' pedagogy and the climate they created in their classrooms. In Somerview the teacher viewed children as individuals, had high expectations of all children and actively intervened with an extensive range of strategies to motivate the boys to ensure the writing had agency for them and to give the boys a sense of autonomy over their writing. Further, unlike her colleague in Y4, or her counterparts in Estateside and Brooktown, this teacher also consulted with the boys to find out the issues they faced, and intervened to adapt her practice to better meet the needs of the boys, such as enabling boys to choose whether they attended additional writing support sessions, rather than removing boys from the literacy class for additional handwriting support, something the boys strongly disliked.

By comparison, in Estateside and Brooktown the teachers' viewed children as groups, rather than individuals, and their expectations of the children were lower as a result of their gender and socio-economical judgements of the boys' ability as writers. They were less aware of the way the boys were feeling about themselves as writers, or their role in influencing their feelings and as a result they made few adaptations to their teaching to meet the needs of the boys, such as to trust them to have autonomy over their writing, something of importance to the boys.

The impact of these different classroom climates on the boys was evident in the way they talked about themselves as writers, with the Somerview boys having more positive perceptions of themselves as writers in phase 2, than they had in phase 1, in contrast to Estateside and Brooktown, where all the boys I interviewed either perceived that girls outperformed boys in literacy or in their ability to conform to an acceptable standard of behaviour in the classroom. The extent to which changes in pedagogy and the climate individual teachers create in their classrooms affects the boys' feelings about themselves as writers, is something I will continue to track in phase 3.

Appendix 5

Example of comparative analysis of data sets from interviews with the boys and their teachers in Somerview, Estateside and Brooktown at the end of phase 3, for the categories Differential Performance and Fairness

Points of convergence and conflict between the data sources are shown in **bold** type and conflicts in *italics*. Themes emerging are: gender & socio-economic beliefs; self-belief; expectations and pedagogy.

Data sources	Somerview	Estateside	Brooktown
Interviews with the boys in phase 1	In phase 1, with the exception of Richard the boys thought they were treated unfairly & that girls and boys performed differently in different school subjects in their classroom.	In phase 1, without exception the boys thought they were treated unfairly , but with the exception of Cal, the boys thought <i>girls and boys performed equally in school subjects</i> .	In phase 1, without exception, the boys thought they were treated unfairly , Hakan & John thought girls behaved better or worked harder than boys , & Uri & Elan thought girls got more opportunities to do well.
Interviews with the boys in phases 2&3	In phases 2 & 3, without exception, the boys' thought they were treated <i>fairly</i> as individuals & with the exception of Joel in phase 3, that <i>boys and girls performed equally well in literacy</i> in their classroom.	In phases 2 & 3, without exception, the boys thought they were treated unfairly & that girls outperformed boys in literacy in their school.	In phases 2 & 3, without exception the boys they were treated unfairly & with the exception of Elan in phase 2, the boys thought girls outperformed boys in literacy in their school.
Interviews with the teachers in phase 1	In phase 1, the teacher had gendered perceptions of boys & girls as literacy learners & showed no awareness of the boys' sense of injustice.	In phase 1, the teacher had gendered perceptions of boys & girls as literacy learners & showed no awareness of the boys' sense of injustice .	
Interviews with the teachers in phases 2&3	In phases 2 & 3 the teachers <i>viewed boys and girls as individuals</i> , rather than through the lens of their gender and <i>actively intervened to find out the issues the boys faced in their literacy learning</i> , and <i>collaborated with colleagues to identify</i>	In phases 2 & 3 the teachers held gender stereotypical beliefs about boys and girls as literacy learners & were unaware of the issues the boys faced in their literacy learning, such as their strong sense of injustice in the classroom and their	In phases 2 & 3, all the teachers held strongly socio-economic stereotypical beliefs & judged all the children to be underachieving as a result of their home background. With the exception of the Y5 teacher (U), the other teachers also held gender stereotypical beliefs about

	<i>ways to address the issues.</i>	deteriorating relationships with the girls and did not intervene to address this.	boys and girls as literacy learners & were unaware of the issues the boys' faced in their literacy learning, such as their strong sense of injustice, and did not intervene to address this.
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Memo

These findings show distinct contrasts between the conditions in which the boys in these three different schools were learning. This helped to explain the improvements in the ways the boys felt about themselves as writers in Y5 and Y6 in Somerview in contrast to the decline in Y5 and Y6 in Estateside and Brooktown schools.

In Somerview, unlike the Y4 teacher, the Y5 and Y6 teachers viewed the boys as individuals, had high expectations of all the children, and actively intervened to consult with the boys to find out why they were reluctant to write in the classroom, and through critical reflection on practice with colleagues identified ways to successfully resolve classroom issues. These were significant factors in improving the way that the Somerview boys perceived themselves as writers in relation to the girls and in improving their response to writing in their classroom.

By contrast, the Y5 and Y6 Estateside and Brooktown teachers did not view the children as individuals, rather they judged them by their gender and their socio-economic background and this lowered their expectations of the children. In these conditions, the teachers intervened less to change the situation, did not consult with the boys about their issues or their colleagues about how to resolve classroom problems. As a result the teachers were unaware of the extent of the boys' feelings of injustice or the extent to which this influenced their feelings about writing. The Estateside and Brooktown teachers' lack of critical reflection on their own role in influencing the boys' perceptions of themselves as writers was a significant factor in the strengthening of the boys' belief that girls outperformed them in writing and had more opportunities to do well in their school.

Appendix 6

Theoretically significant propositions

Proposition 1: It is important for teachers to understand gender issues , in relation to boys' writing, to ensure they are able to create a classroom climate where boys' are viewed as individuals, where their writing is valued and where boys want to write.	
Data sources	Evidence
9 interviews with teachers	<p>a) "... and we have been ... talking about it directly [<i>to the children</i>]. You know, 'why do you find writing hard, what can we do?' ... that helped us plan our steps, our things to tackle in those sessions (Y5 Somerview teacher, phase 2). "I think the girls are more open to suggestion ... boys particularly say, no, I never read those [<i>genres</i>], I wouldn't read that ... but it's not impossible to crack ... " ... I read ... the Breadwinner and it's about a girl in Afghanistan ... the boys were very willing to accept they'd never have picked it up ... I made it happen, they actually at the end of it wanted to read the next one. ... (Y6 Somerview teacher, phase 3)</p> <p>b) "... boys are very much minimal ... high achieving girls, and their problem is they are just too flowery..." (Y5 Estateside teacher, phase 2) "... girls are more inclined to read fictional writing ... the girls are more likely [<i>than the boys</i>] to want to write". (Y6 Estateside teacher, phase 3)</p> <p>c) "...boys get off task very quickly, very quickly, er girls tend to talk to each other and they do share ideas ... (Y5 Brooktown teacher (H&J), phase 2)" "... I would imagine the girls probably read more ... they [<i>the boys</i>] probably don't like reading ... (Y6 Brooktown teacher H&J), phase 3)</p>
9 interviews with boys	<p>a) "... Well, I think that teachers, well it depends on whose behaviour is best ..." (Owen, Somerview, phase 2). "Um, it depends [<i>the way the children are treated</i>] again on the individual" (Joel, Somerview, phase 3)</p> <p>b) "...I think that like sometimes I think that um girls do better at school cos they get an easier time ..." (Jack, Estateside, phase 2). "... the girls get in less trouble so it ends up frustrating the boys so they do less work." (Cal, Estateside, phase 3) "... I think we should set it into an actual debate into the classroom so we can sort out our problems [<i>between boys and girls</i>]." (Jack, Estateside, phase 3)</p> <p>c) "... but only boys who chew gum have to stay in and a few days ago a girl was caught and she [<i>the teacher</i>] didn't say anything ..." (John, Brooktown, phase 3). "They treat girls better ... I think it's wrong really ..." (Hakan, Brooktown, phase 3)</p>
Figs. 7.1 schematic diagram in Chapter 7	Figure 7.1 shows how negative and socio-economic stereotypical beliefs impacts on teachers' expectations of pupils and contributes to the underachievement of boys in writing.
My journal entries	The Y5 and Y6 Somerview teachers consistently referred to the

	<p>boys as individuals, and actively intervened to find out the barriers the boys faced and adapted their practice to meet the needs of the boys. Both these teachers saw themselves as agents of change. The effect of this on the boys was that they felt a greater sense of responsibility for their own actions and the impact of these on others in the class, had a greater sense of justice and were more able to start and sustain their classroom writing tasks. This was in stark contrast to their feelings in Y4, where with the exception of Richard, the boys thought they were treated unfairly and showed greater resistance to writing in their classroom.</p> <p>By contrast, with the exception of the Y5 Brooktown teacher (U) who talked about the children as a whole class, the other Y5 and Y6 Estateside and Brooktown teachers talked about boys and girls as gendered groups, rather than as individual boys and girls with different strengths and weaknesses. Although the teachers recognised the boys had difficulties in reading and writing they did not talk about any interventions they had made to particularly help the boys. There was a sort of “this is how I think it is here” rather than “this is what I know I am going to do to change this”. As a result of the teachers’ lack of action, the boys’ gendered views were reinforced and strengthened and this contributed to a classroom climate where the boys felt less valued and where they were reluctant to persevere with their writing, particularly when they were faced with difficulties.</p>
Proposition 2: Given the evident difficulties the boys had with certain technical aspects of writing it is helpful if teachers find ways to help them to go beyond the technical aspects to be able to engage with their writing.	
Data sources	Evidence
9 interviews with teachers	<p><i>Phase 1:</i> “... for the boys it’s handwriting ...” (Y4, Somerview teacher, phase 1)</p> <p><i>Phase 2:</i> “... It’s easy to get caught up in looking at the strategy (<i>NLS</i>), getting caught up in ‘paragraphs this’ and ‘direct speech that’ ... those are important but within the overarching context ...” (Y5 Somerview teacher, phase 2) “... sentence structure they [<i>all the children</i>] find difficult in terms of connectives, using noun clauses and knowing where to put the full stop... they are very much aware of the technical side of the language “ (Y5, Brooktown Teacher(E), phase 2)</p> <p><i>Phase 3:</i> “...the purpose is important ... they need to be submersed before they write ... they need a really good knowledge [<i>of the content</i>] ... within that they’ve got to weave in ... technical element” (Y6 Estateside teacher, phase 3)</p>
9 interviews with boys	<p>Boys’ responses to the question: “What makes it difficult to write?”</p> <p><i>Phase 1:</i> “... I find it difficult to use grammar and punctuation and um</p>

	<p>joining up.” (Owen, Somerview)</p> <p>“...when you write your fingers ache...” (Lewis, Estateside)</p> <p>“... [<i>writing is difficult</i>] when your hands hurt, (John, Brooktown)</p> <p><i>Phase 2:</i></p> <p>“... [<i>when we are told</i>] write something about what we’re learning and it puts you on the spot ...” (Richard, Somerview, phase 2)</p> <p>“...I think punctuation and I just don’t really think about it then and full stops and capital letters ... (Kelvin, Estateside)</p> <p>“...The only thing that stops me from writing is um spelling ...” (Elan, Brooktown)</p> <p><i>Phase 3:</i></p> <p>“...Well I think like sometimes it’s the kind of writing ...” (Richard, Somerview)</p> <p>“... When we done like autobiographies because it was a really long piece of writing I didn’t really like it ...”. (Kelvin, Estateside)</p> <p>“... You won’t have time, right, for a long piece of writing (Uri, Brooktown)</p>
My journal entries	<p>In Y4 and Y5, with the exception of the Y5 Somerview teacher, the teachers focused their teaching on the technical aspects of writing, in contrast to Y6 where the teachers focused on genre. The impact of this on the boys was evident in their responses to the question “What do you find difficult about writing?” In Y4 and Y5 (with the exception of the Somerview boys) the boys mainly focused their responses on their difficulties with the technical aspects of writing, whereas in Y6 they focused on genre. I would not suggest this was an indication that they had fewer difficulties with the technical aspects of writing when their teachers focused on genre, rather they were less conscious of these aspects and more conscious of the genre in which they were writing.</p> <p>Although the teachers’ autonomy over the teaching of writing was constrained, to a certain extent, by the technical approach embedded in the NLS in the Y4 and Y5 teaching programmes, the Y5 Somerview teacher did manage to adapt her teaching to focus more on the meaning and purpose of writing and this had a marked impact on the way the boys talked about writing and in their more positive attitude to writing in this phase. Given the boys’ comments indicating they were more motivated to write when the writing was purposeful, it is a pity the Y4 teachers in all three schools and the Y5 teachers in Estateside and Brooktown, did not adapt their teaching to the same extent the Y5 Somerview teacher did.</p>
Proposition 3: A culture of collective responsibility , and consistency in the practice of teaching literacy contributes to boys’ ability to face the demands of writing particularly in Y5 and Y6.	
Data sources	Evidence
9 interviews teachers	a) “... We [<i>teachers in the school</i>] had a discussion earlier on in the year about reading responses. As a school they [<i>the</i>

	<p><i>children</i>] go through writing reading responses throughout the years and they just grow as the children grow... in Y4 and Y5 you're really giving them all the skills, so they're rehearsing all the skills and in thinking well I've got to use that skill and that skill and saying now in Y6 you've got all those skills and to really enjoy it ... (Somerview Y6 teacher, phase 3)</p> <p>b) "... being secure on the kind of text types [<i>genres</i>], .. an issue ... for groups maybe across the school ... that writing for a purpose ... is missing ...<i>[in the teaching prior to children's entry into Y6]</i> (Estateside Y6 teacher, phase 3)</p> <p>c) "... I think that they [<i>the children</i>] have a problem with grammatical structure and that's right across the school ..." (Brooktown Y6 teacher (LL/U), phase 3)</p>
9 interviews boys	<p>a) "... when I'm really trying to do a piece of writing like a story I normally take very long cos I like to make my story long and interesting ..." (Tim, Somerview, phase 3)</p> <p>b) "... When, like, when the teachers say something like "when you've finished you get free time" and then when other people finish you're like the only ones left, and then you really want to rush it to get the free time..." (Kelvin, Estateside, phase 3)</p> <p>c) "The teachers stop you in a long piece of writing that you never get finished cos they keep stopping you and things like that." (John, Brooktown, phase 3)</p>
Somerview literacy policy	<p>"We value the creative process of writing, using talk, oral rehearsal and planned opportunities to share and extend ideas verbally. This happens as a precursor to all writing. ... We help children to develop their writing stamina as they move through KS2, building in regular opportunities for extended writing linked to the wider curriculum. .. Teachers and TAs use the Reading Response diaries after guided reading sessions to communicate with parents the next steps for their child's reading, and offer suggestions for how to help at home .. Children's writing is promoted and supported and their achievements and independence encouraged and valued so that they feel confident and successful as writers." (Somerview Literacy policy)</p>
Somerview, Estateside and Brooktown Ofsted Reports	<p>a) Teachers and teaching assistants work exceedingly well in partnership to make learning motivating and fun.... Pupils' progress accelerates across Key Stage 2 and by the end of Year 6 attainment is high, especially in reading, with writing skills also improving as a result of the school's strategies (Somerview Ofsted Report)</p> <p>b) There have been improvements in teaching but this is inconsistent in challenging more able pupils ... pupils achievement in reading is good but better use of targets is needed to raise standards in writing ... (Estateside Ofsted Report)</p> <p>c) There are inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and in the</p>

	use of assessment ... pupils do not make the progress they are capable of ... provision for English has improved but in writing standards are not sufficiently high ... (Brooktown Ofsted Report)
My journal entries	<p>The Somerview teacher's comments focused on 'we' rather than 'I', was an indication of the collaborative way in with the staff work together to share practice and the proactive approach they take to involving parents in their children's learning. As a result the boys experienced greater consistency in the teaching of literacy as well as extended opportunities to read and write at home with their parents. This helped them to develop their stamina as writers and increased their confidence to tackle the more difficult extended pieces of writing, particularly in Y6 their SATs year. The value the Somerview staff place on collaboration is exemplified throughout the school Literacy Policy and the impact of this on children's progress is something the Ofsted inspectors highlighted when they reported on the school.</p> <p>By comparison the Y6 Estateside and Brooktown teachers' comments indicated they were working in a culture of isolation, where there was little collaboration between staff and parents and where practice across the school was inconsistent and where the children arrived in Y6 unprepared for the demands of writing in their SATs year. The inconsistency in practice is something the Ofsted inspectors highlighted when they reported on these schools.</p>
Proposition 4: Boys whose families consistently support them to write at home show greater commitment to their writing in the classroom. Parents can be supported in this role by the school, most important where children in the school are drawn from largely disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds.	
Data sources	Evidence
9 interviews with teachers	<p>a) "... they are good readers, so they've got lots of good experience of modelling [<i>at home and school</i>] so they know what they're aiming for and I think that means expectations are higher from us and them ... " (Y6 Somerview teacher, phase 3)</p> <p>b) "... we [<i>the Headteacher and I</i>] were discussing, you know, making sure that every Y6 child has a library ticket ... the kids were taking home books and that particular set of guided reading books, I mean we've only got two left now within the school, you know, some never came back ... knowing where to put that kinda support in at home as well ... the children really have to buy in ... " (Y6 Estateside teacher, phase 3)</p> <p>c) "... and the parent would have modelled for them the language ... but if you don't have a language rich background ... and you're not in that language rich environment the school now has to model that, so I'm doing that work that the parent would have done but in terms of prompt cards. ... " (Y5 Brooktown teacher (E), phase 2)</p>
9 interviews with boys	a) "... cos my mum tells me to write a whole diary and she helps me in trying to plan it and then write it all the way down and just get it all into your head and write it all down." (Tim, Somerview,

	<p>phase 2)</p> <p>b) "I don't write much at home ... well there's no people that help me to write really" (Kelvin, Estateside, phase 2)</p> <p>c) "... cos if I don't get any homework my mum and dad says if you don't get any homework you need to do something to encourage you nobody does it with me I do it on my own." (Elan, Brooktown, phase 2)</p>
Somerview Reading Response Policy	<p>"... regular workshops for parents to explain our approach to reading and writing and give ideas on how to help at home... We have a booklet "helping your child with writing" given to parents when children join the school... The Reading Response Diary is used to communicate with parents the next steps for their child's reading and gives suggestions for how to help at home ... " (Somerview Literacy Policy)</p>
Somerview Ofsted Report	<p>Partnerships with parents and carers are excellent and contribute significantly to the high quality of pupil achievement ... (Somerview Ofsted Report)</p>
My journal entries	<p>The Somerview teacher's comment indicates the children receive support at home for their literacy and the children's comments indicate the extensive nature of the help they have received. The schools extensive implementation of the Reading Response Diaries throughout the children's life at primary school has meant the parents are constantly in touch with what their children are learning and how they can help them to make progress. As a result the boys arrived at school with a readiness to learn and showed greater commitment to their learning as they prepared for their SATs tests in Y5 and Y6. The role the school takes in helping the parents to help their children to learn to read and write is exemplified in their Reading Response policy and the impact of this on pupils' achievement is highlighted in the school's Ofsted Report.</p> <p>By contrast the Estateside and Brooktown teachers judged the children's families to be unable to support their children and were unsure of their own role in engaging families in their children's literacy learning. Nevertheless, Jack in Estateside, Elan and Hakan in Brooktown's did mention help from their families, but Elan and Hakan's comments indicated they were less sure how to best help them. Although the Y6 Estateside teacher did intervene with a home reading scheme, and this did contribute to, with the exception of Cal, the Estateside boys mentioning help from families in Y6, the teacher thought the scheme had been unsuccessful. Although the Ofsted Reports for these schools indicate there was a good relationship with parents and in one school cited a scheme to support one group of ESL parents, there was no mention of a whole school scheme to engage all parents in their children's learning. As a result the Estateside and Brooktown boys did not arrive in their classrooms with the same readiness to learn as their counterparts in Somerview and this contributed to their particular difficulties in Y5 and Y6 where the boys were faced with greater challenges in their writing tasks.</p>

Proposition 5: If teachers use a wide range of strategies to give boys' autonomy over their writing they are more likely to be motivated to start and then to persist with their writing.	
Data sources	Evidence
9 interviews with teachers	<p>a) "ownership as well because, you know, I've given them a choice of topic ... we do lots of peer assessment ... partner work for writing ... using a range of different things to start writing, so objects, videos, music, ... the use of drama and of talking about something before getting down to the writing stages" (Y5 Somerview teacher, phase 2).</p> <p>"... children are much more able to think and plan [<i>when they are using computers</i>] it's complete ownership of the way it looks ... and we've really worked hard on talking to their partner about their ideas before they write" (Y6 Somerview teacher, phase 3)</p> <p>b) "... we're also giving them the opportunities to improve their writing and responding to it ... we've just [<i>when the boys I interviewed were in the last term of Y6</i>] introduced a new marking and assessment procedure ..." (Y6 Estateside teacher, phase 3)</p> <p>c) "... It's taken a really long time to get them to, um, feedback to partners and talk about improvements "we're in Y6 and we're trying to fix all of these things"." (Y6 Brooktown teacher, phase 3)</p>
9 interviews with boys	<p>Boys' responses to the question "What makes it easier to write?"</p> <p>a) "... I find it easier to type on the computers because I'm quite fast and we only ever do it for really long pieces of writing ..." (Lee, Somerview, phase 2) ... it makes it a lot easier because it's got a spelling program, a proof reading program, you can change your writing without making it messy (Lee, Somerview phase 3). "A peer, a partner, it helps a lot because I've got time to plan..." (Joel, Somerview, phase 3)</p> <p>b) "And um, the teacher that comes in on [<i>one day a week</i>] if we're stuck or something we go over to her and she tells us to sit down ... when she comes to us she gives us an idea that we might not want to do and then she like basically forces us to do it and then if you don't want to do it cos it's our work and we want to make it as like... and I don't learn anything it just makes me get doubts. Mr ... [<i>who teaches the class for four days a week</i>] guides us through it to tell us which parts we can like improve and change and if it's completely a mess and he can tell we haven't tried at all I think it's fair that we should start again. (Jack, Estateside, phase 3)</p> <p>c) "[<i>I misbehave</i>] when I've finished the work and there's nothing to do. [John, phase 3].</p> <p>"... You just get bored then when you can't think of any ideas..." (Hakan, Brooktown, phase 3)</p>
Somerview, Estateside & Brooktown Ofsted Reports	<p>a) "Pupils positive attitudes in lessons, high levels of cooperation and excellent independent learning skills contribute significantly to their outstanding achievement ... Use of drama, role play and 'talk partners' motivates pupils and enables them to make</p>

	<p>excellent progress, particularly in their speaking and reading... “ (Somerview Ofsted Report)</p> <p>b) Pupils enjoy role play, problem solving and using computers ... However teaching is not consistent (Estateside Ofsted Report).</p> <p>c) Pupils enjoy opportunities to collaborate, such as through ‘talk partners’ ... but there is inconsistency in the quality of feedback and not all pupils understand how to improve their work further (Brooktown Ofsted Report)</p>
Figs. 7.2 & 7.3 spiral diagrams in Chapter 7	<p>Fig. 7.3 shows the factors that contribute to an upward trend in boys' attitude to writing.</p> <p>Fig. 7.2 shows the factors that contribute to a downward trend in boys' attitude to writing.</p>
My journal entries	<p>In Somerview, the Y5 and Y6 teachers used a wider range of strategies to motivate the boys to write and to give them autonomy over their writing, in contrast to the Y4 teacher who used a narrower range of strategies. Although the Y4 teacher used peer partners, the boys were not as able to work effectively with their peers in Y4 as they were in Y5 and Y6. The Somerview Ofsted report indicated how the teaching strategies contributed significantly to the children's ability to write independently and the impact this had on the children's outstanding achievement.</p> <p>Although the Estateside and Brooktown teachers used strategies to motivate the boys to write, these were limited in range and practices such as peer review were not widely embedded in the practice of all teachers in the school. This finding was confirmed in the school Ofsted reports that indicated teachers did use strategies to motivate the boys but that these were inconsistent in teachers' daily practice. As a result the boys were more dependent on their teachers for help and where they did not receive help quickly or get effective feedback from their teachers, they were unsure of their next steps, found it difficult to manage their behaviour and suffered a loss of self-esteem.</p>

Appendix 7

Interview guide for use with focus groups of pupils

Aim of focus groups: To find out how boys feel about their writing [*through group interaction*].

What will happen: Each discussion will consist of 6 boys and the researcher. The discussions will be repeated annually, in the early part of the summer term, in 2008, 2009 and 2010 when the children are in Y4, Y5 and Y6. Each discussion will be held in a quiet room and will last for around half an hour.

Ground Rules: Only one person speak at a time, every one taking part.

Useful Prompt: Michael, that's something we're definitely interested in learning more about. What can any of you tell us about that?

Ice Breaker: Each person introduce themselves and tell us something about what they like to do for fun.

Pupils' views on school and their own achievement

1. Do you like school?
2. What do you like doing best at school? Is there anything you don't like? Why?
3. Do you think it's important to do well at school? Why (not)?
4. Is there anything that stops you from learning? Could you do anything yourself to help you to work better?

Attitude towards and competence in writing

5. Do you like writing? Why/Why not?
6. What sort of things makes it difficult to write?
7. What sort of things makes it easy to write?
8. What sorts of things do you like to write at school? What's a recent favourite?
9. Do you write at home? What sort of things do you like to write at home?
10. Are there any people who have really helped you with your writing?
11. Why do you think people need to be able to write?

Pupils' views on gender

12. Do girls or boys do better in your school or are they both the same? [If one sex or the other, ask why.]
13. Do girls or boys work harder or are they both the same? [If one sex or the other, explore further.]
14. Do the teachers treat boys and girls the same?

Focus on school support

15. Is there something the school could do to help you improve?
16. Do you think you get lots of praise and encouragement?
17. Do you think the teachers do anything particularly to help boys?
18. What happens if you don't do your work properly?

Final Question: What do you think has been the most important thing you've just discussed?

Appendix 8

Aide-memoire for interview with teachers

Intro: Explore your views about children, particularly boys, learning to write

Starter: Share your own experience of learning to write?

Writing

Do children in your class enjoy writing?

Types [articles for news sheets / stories / poems]

Problems [handwriting / spelling / grammar]

Attitudes

Gender difference [boys less positive / more / no difference]

Shown by [concentration / off task / not finishing writing]

Reasons why [nature of task / experiences of reading]

Solutions

Pedagogical strategies that appeal to boys [drama / film / purpose / real audience / content / peer feedback / ICT]

Outcomes of this [raised self-esteem / positive attitude]

Conclude: Advice to a new teacher about teaching writing

Appendix 9

Letter of invitation to Headteachers



Department of Education & Professional Studies
King's College London
Franklin-Wilkins Building
London SE1 9NH

[Letter to Headteachers]
[add Date]

Dear Headteacher

I am a researcher at Kings College London and am writing to invite your school to join a research project I'm conducting entitled: **Assessing the factors which contribute to improving children's attitudes towards writing, with a particular focus on boys.**

For some while boys' underperformance against girls in writing has been an issue for many schools and you may be interested to help me to try to explore some of the underlying issues which children face when they are asked to engage in writing activities in school.

The project will consist of:

- Focus group interviews with groups of children annually over a 22 month period in Y4, Y5 & Y6 to find out what the children think influences/helps/hinders them and to identify any change over time
- Follow up interviews with individual children to explore emerging issues/experiences in greater depth
- Survey of all children in Y4, Y5 & Y6 based on issues/experiences emerging from focus groups

I would also like to interview both yourself and the class teacher to explore your views about the issues children face when they are writing in school.

I will be tape recording the focus group interviews and once I have transcribed these, I will immediately delete the tapes. Pupils' names will remain anonymous in the transcriptions.

At the end of the project I will be writing a report to summarise and share the findings more widely with other schools and the research community. The school and contributing staff will be acknowledged in the report. However, at no time will individual children's names be used in the report.

I'll contact you by telephone next week to answer any queries you may have and to discuss whether you are interested in joining the project.

Yours sincerely

Gill Edwards
Researcher, Kings College London

Appendix 10

Information sheet for participants



University of London

Department of Education & Professional Studies
King's College London
Franklin-Wilkins Building
London SE1 9NH

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

Title of Study: Assessing the factors which contribute to improving children's attitudes towards writing.

Children have been randomly selected to take part in small group discussions with a number of their classmates. Written parental consent will be required before a child takes part. Children will be asked to give verbal consent before taking part.

Aims of the research: To find out more about children's attitudes to writing to inform teachers and help them to find ways to support children to become more confident in their writing.

Who we are recruiting: 3 x groups of 6 children in Y4 to talk about how they feel about writing

What will happen if participants agree to take part: Each discussion will consist of 6 children and the researcher. The discussions will be repeated 3 times and will take place early in the summer term 2008, late in the Autumn term 2009 and early in the Autumn term 2010. Each discussion will be held in a quiet room and will last for around half an hour. A small number of children may be asked to attend one-to-one interviews. All children will be asked to complete a short questionnaire.

Any risks: The discussions will be confidential and at no time will individual children's names be used in any discussions the researcher has with others interested in the project. The discussions will be tape recorded and once the tapes have been listened to the recordings will be deleted.

Possible benefits: The researcher will be writing a report at the end of the project to share the findings with other schools and parents will be offered a copy of the report. At no time will individual children's names be used in the report.

Name & Contact details of the researcher: Gill Edwards, Researcher, Department of Education & Professional Studies, Kings College London, Franklin-Wilkins Building, London, SE1 9NH

It is up to parents to decide whether their children can take part and it is up to children to decide whether they want to take part. If parents give permission and children decide to take part they are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.



Appendix 11

Letter to parents requesting permission

Department of Education & Professional Studies
King's College London
Franklin-Wilkins Building
London SE1 9NH

Reference (REP(EM)/07/08-70)

[Letter to 6 parents of Y4 children]
[add Date]

Dear Parents

I am a researcher at Kings College London working on a project entitled: *Assessing the factors which contribute to improving children's attitudes towards writing.*

For some while there has been a concern to identify how schools can best support children to become confident and competent writers and to help them overcome any barriers. The school has agreed that I undertake some research with your children.

I will be discussing writing with children and asking them to complete a questionnaire. Your child might also be asked to attend both group and / or one-to-one interviews.

I will be tape recording the interviews and once I have listened to these, key points will be noted without reference to your individual children's names, I will delete the recording.

At the end of the project I will be writing a report to summarise and share our findings more widely with other schools and the research community. At no time will your individual children's names be used in the report.

I do hope you will give your consent to your child's involvement in this exciting project. However, should you wish at anytime for your child to be withdrawn from this research project, all you need to do is let us know. Could you please sign and return to the tear off slip below.

Yours sincerely

Gill Edwards
Researcher, Kings College London

Please complete and return this tear off slip to Gill Edwards, c/o the school office by [add date]

Research Project: *Assessing the factors which contribute to improving children's performance in writing.*

Name of Pupil _____

I **do** / **do not** give consent for my child to be involved in the above research project.
Please delete as appropriate

Signature of Parent / Guardian _____ Date _____

Appendix 12

Example of analysis of pupil interaction in focus group interviews

Extract from interview with the Somerview boys in phase 1

Interviewer: “Do you think boys or girls do better in your school or do you think they are about the same?”

All five boys: “Intakes of breath.” [*and raised eyebrows expressing surprise*]

Lee: “I think they achieve better in different subjects.”

Interviewer: “Ok, would you like to explain a little bit.”

Lee: “Well, I find that girls um are very good at art but they’re not so good at PE.”

Owen: I think the same as Lee, that girls are good at art and they’re not so good at PE.

Joel: “I think girls can do stuff more kind of like hand writing, literacy and art and sometimes in PE but boys are better at like science and physical really physical work out.”

Richard: “I don’t want to be sexist but I’m going to say that they’re even”.

Tim: “Well, what I think is, I actually agree with Lee because, it’s just because that also I think that sometimes people, some girls can be just not concentrating on work and sometimes really going for it, sometimes really thinking about it but sometimes the boys they can sometimes just go chatty chatty chat and don’t bother to do their work and also, sometimes they just go, I just want to concentrate on this work of mine instead of just going chatty chatty.”

All five boys: “I agree, I agree”

Analysis

After initially expressing surprise, in the form of loud intakes of breath and raised eyebrows, at having been asked the question, the boys then began to contribute their views. Lee was the first to outline his position, which was that girls and boys achieved differently in different subjects, to which Owen (second) and Joel (third) agreed and gave their reasons for agreement. However, Richard (fourth) then disagreed with his classmates, stating that he thought there was no difference in boys and girls aptitudes in different school subjects. Tim (fifth) then offered his view, which was a conciliatory one, and by turning the focus of attention away from school subjects and

to the extent to which girls and boys concentrated on their work, he was able to find something all the boys could agree on, which they then did. By doing this Tim has achieved social cohesion within the group.

Extract from interview with the Estateside boys in phase 3

Interviewer: "So, do you think boys or girls do better at school or do you think they're about the same?"

Cal: "Girls do better because they get in less trouble."

Kelvin: "Girls do better."

Jack: "I think girls do better because they don't, well I thought of something and now I've forgotten what I was going to say."

Cal: "BECAUSE like, when the boys like and the girls both do something wrong, like the same thing, but the girls get in less trouble so it ends up frustrating the boys so they do less work."

Cal: "AND we think that because say one of the girls had hit us and as soon as we go to miss, miss um, the girls make up a story saying that they hit us first and then we get in trouble."

Interviewer: "So, is there anything that you've done that's made any of that better?"

Cal: "We've just left the girls alone, but they still come over to us."

Jack: "Yes, one girl our class the other day, I was just talking to Leo and she came over, yeh and she just started poking me in the face."

Leo: "Yeh"

Interviewer: "What did you do?"

Jack: "I just walked off and I said why are you doing that and she said oh, why are you here go away, and I said I was just talking to Leo so I just walked off and I carried on speaking to Leo."

Kelvin: "AND like a few days ago she dragged one of the boys onto the floor and like for no reason [*Cal interrupts and says that was yesterday*] Yes"

Cal: "She dragged this boy on the floor and he was all dirty, yeh, and started kicking him and everything."

Kelvin: "AND also, one of her friends, she just comes up to us for no reason and then she just slaps us round the face or slaps us round the head."

Jack: “Some people know what people like and say how long do you think it will be before some people come up to me and start hitting me round the head and I say about five seconds. They walk over, start talking to someone and just shout go away and start pushing them away and one girl stabbed one of the boys with a pencil as they was just playing [*interruption from others “in his lip”*] so he walked off because he was bleeding, he didn’t tell miss or nothing and then she started getting upset randomly and she got upset.”

Analysis

Cal (first) responded to my question by stating that he believed girls did better in school because they received preferential treatment, to which Kelvin (second) agreed. Although Jack (third) agreed, he was unable to provide evidence, but this was provided by Cal who used the connective BECAUSE to provide further evidence to support his view. Cal, Jack and Kelvin then continued to take turns, often using the connective AND to continue what the previous contributor had said, to create a graphic narrative, in the form of a shared story, of their experiences in their school. The boys’ stories revealed that the condoning of the girls’ behaviour by their teachers contributed to a ‘laddish’ culture flourishing amongst the girls, and, although Jack had found that walking away defused a confrontation, this did not deter the girls and led to the boys having a strong sense of disempowerment.